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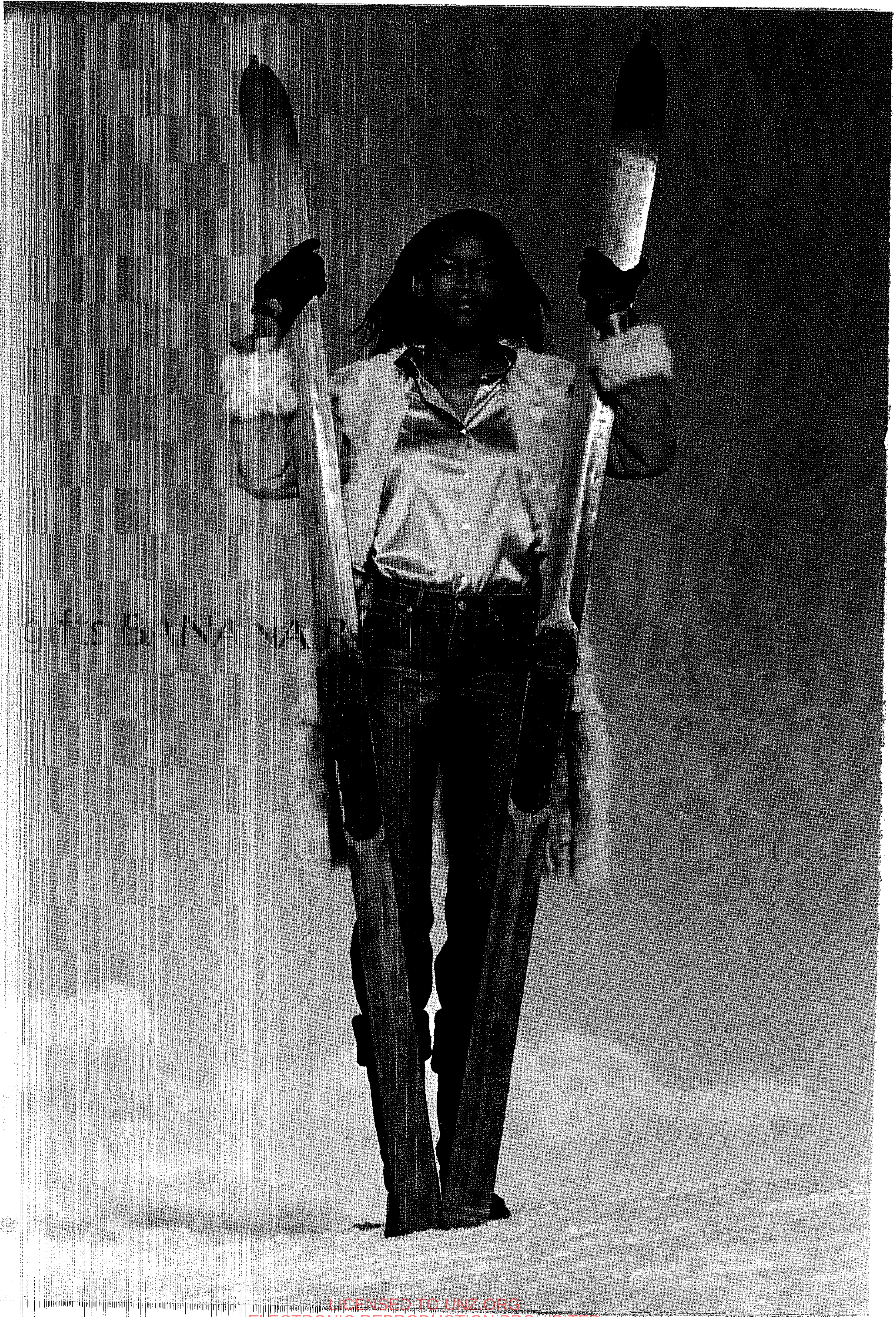

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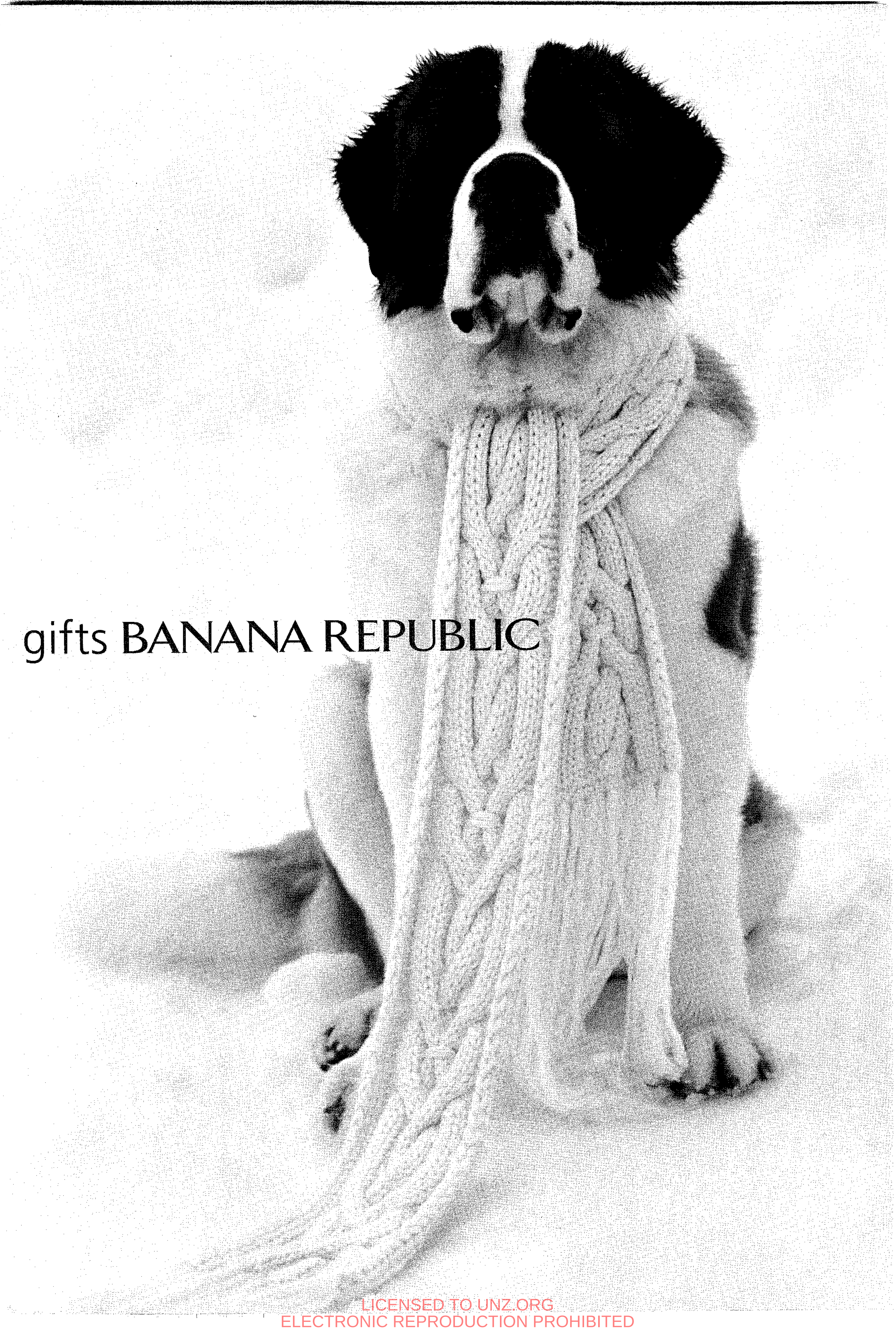

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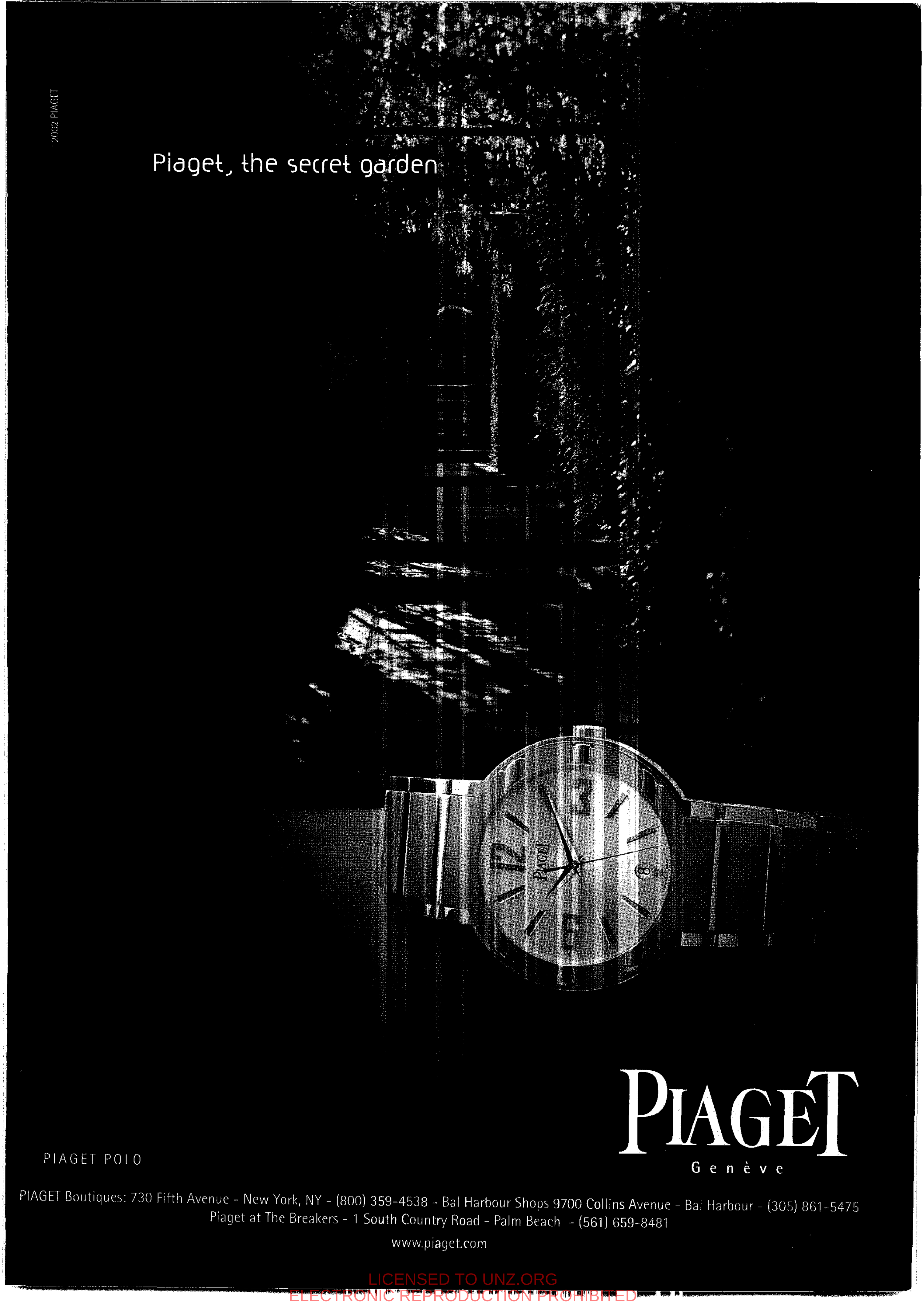
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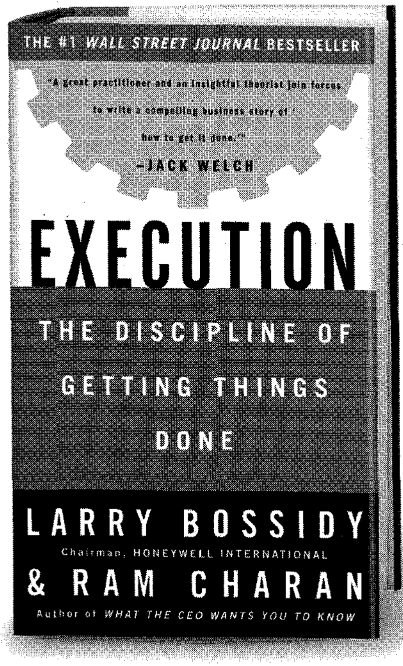
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CROWN BUSINESS

CONTRIBUTORS

Ken Auletta ("Beauty and the Beast," p. 64) writes about the media for the magazine. His book "World War 3.0: Microsoft vs. the U.S. Government, and the Battle to Rule the Digital Age" came out in paperback in April.

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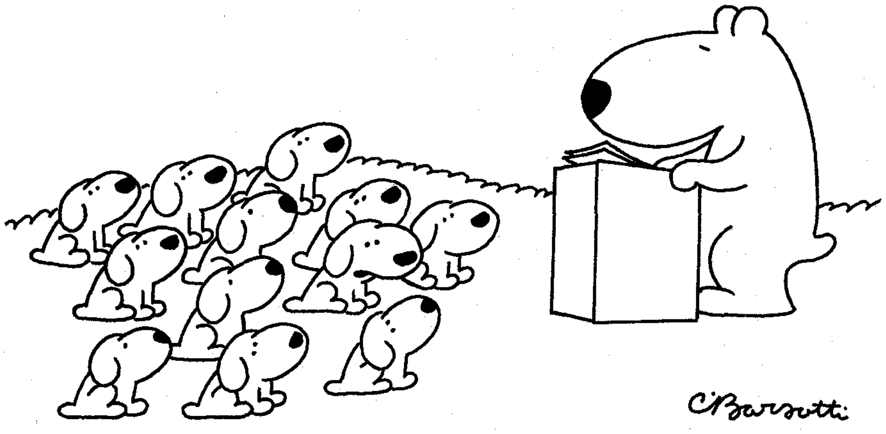
Anthony Lane (The Current Cinema, p. 106) has just published "Nobody's Perfect: Selected Writings from *The New Yorker.*"

Benoît van Innis (Cover) has a new book, "Le Vent Est Bleu," which includes some of his art work for the magazine. ♦



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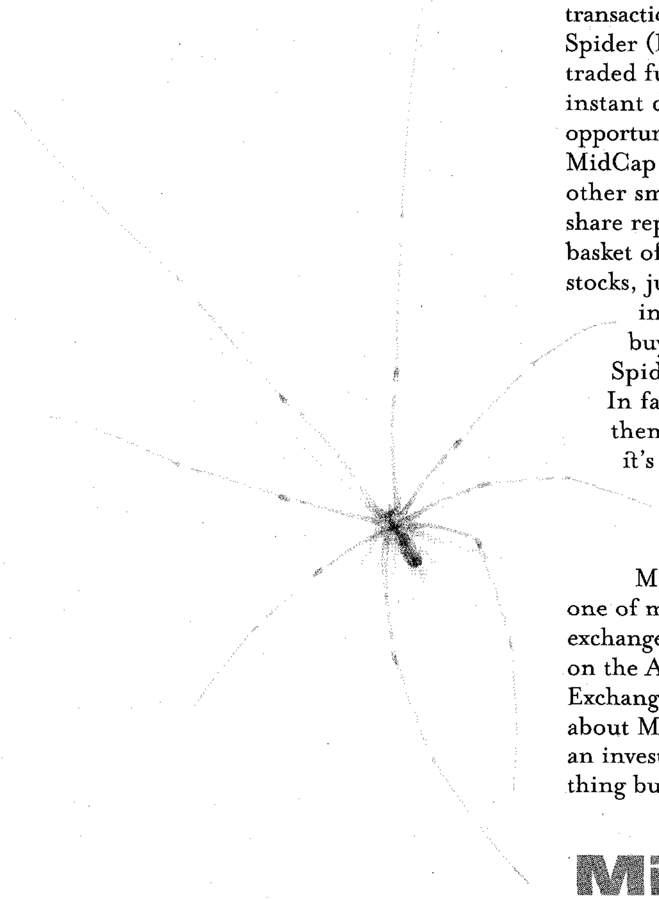

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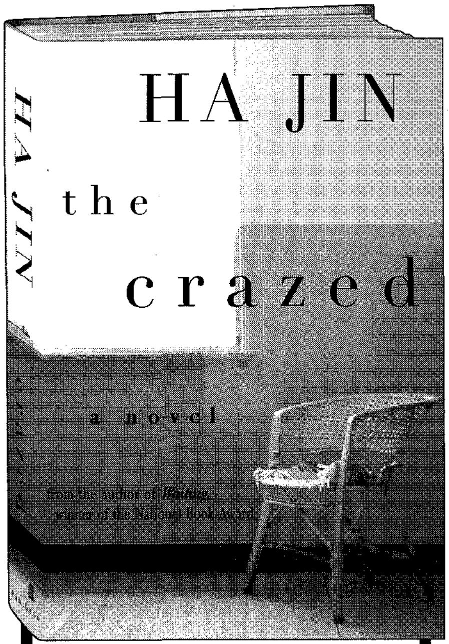
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WHAT PARENTS CAN'T DO

According to Louis Menand, Steven Pinker, in his book "The Blank Slate," and I, in my 1998 book, "The Nurture Assumption," imply that it is "irrelevant . . . that parents can make their children into opera buffs, water-skiers, food connoisseurs, bilingual speakers, painters, trumpet players, and churchgoers—that parents have the power to introduce their children to the whole supra-biological realm—for the fundamental reason that science cannot comprehend what it cannot measure" (Books, November 25th). Neither Pinker nor I regard these things as irrelevant, and they are certainly not unmeasurable. Scientists have shown, for example, that parents have little or no ability (other than by passing on their genes) to make their children into churchgoers, though they can influence which church they will go to, if they do go to one. Parents can try to produce bilingual children by using a foreign language at home, but, unless the children have a chance to use that language outside the home, they will usually fail. Children end up with the language and accent of their peers, not of their parents. Parents can influence some things but not others. The effects of parenting, and of the environment more generally, do not have to remain a mystery or a dogma—they can be investigated empirically. The results, however, may dismay those who have their own personal vision of how the human mind ought to work.

Judith Rich Harris
Middletown, N.J.

The pivotal position Virginia Woolf occupies both in Pinker's book and in Menand's review is intriguing. But I was puzzled by Menand's comment that "Woolf, in short, was a Pinkerite," on the ground that "modernist fiction . . . because it presents character from the inside, shows how persistent personality is, and how impervious to circumstance." In fact, Woolf and other modernist writers assumed that personality, character, and even human nature were intrinsically inconstant and highly mutable—which is why the presentation of human character from the inside was a complex and deeply uncertain endeavor. As Woolf wrote, "Life is not a series of gig lamps symmetrically arranged; life is a luminous halo, a semi-transparent envelope surrounding us from the beginning of consciousness to the end. Is it not the task of the novelist to convey this varying, this unknown and uncircumscribed spirit, whatever aberration or complexity it may display?" Later in her life, she also explicitly criticized "scientific" efforts like Pinker's to naturalize what she saw as ideologically motivated and socially constructed assumptions about gender inequality, capitalism, and war.

Todd Avery
Assistant Professor of English
University of Massachusetts
Lowell, Mass.

SCHWARZENEGGER IN 2004

In his Comment on royal and political dynasties, Hendrik Hertzberg writes that, even if Arnold Schwarzenegger is elected governor of California, "the good news or the bad news . . . is that, by the grace of Article II of the Constitution, he (along with all other Austrian-born action stars) is ineligible to be President" (The Talk of the Town, November 25th). But one could argue that the Fourteenth Amendment, which provides for equal protection under the law for all U.S. citizens, including naturalized ones, should supersede Article II's native-birth requirement. In 1968, there was talk of a Presidential run by the Canadian-born John Kenneth Galbraith, which would have challenged this rule. His prospective campaign apparently met with indifference, and Galbraith went to work for Eugene McCarthy instead.

Alfred O. Myers
Longboat Key, Fla.

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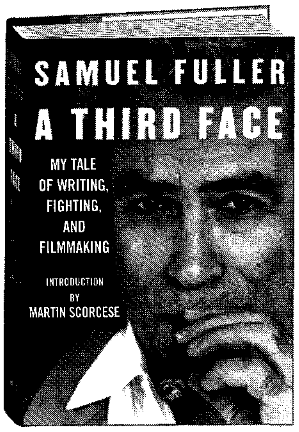
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"*A Third Face* is a lot like one of his best movies —fast paced, easily readable but with the sting of harsh realism on every page. The man was an obsessive storyteller and here, posthumously, he has finally found and told his best yarn—his own." —RICHARD SCHICKEL, THE NEW YORK TIMES BOOK REVIEW

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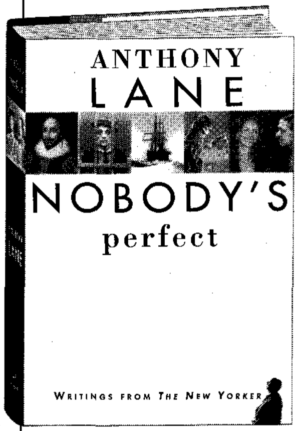

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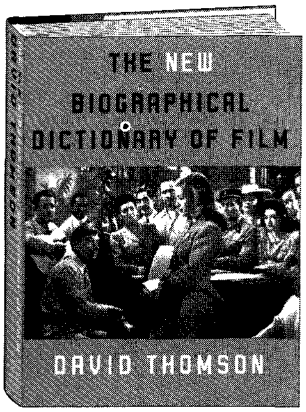

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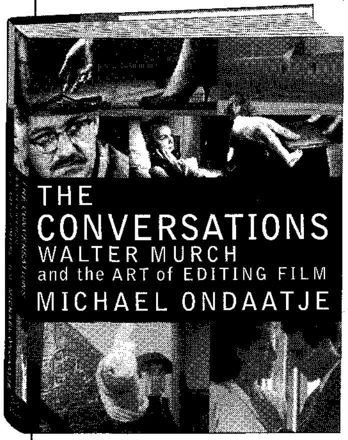

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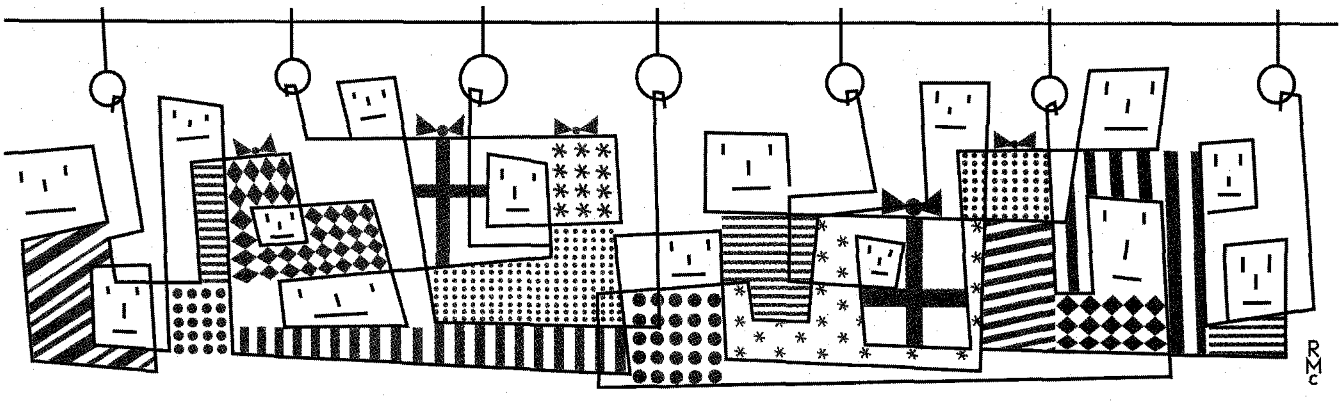

THE THEATRE

OPENINGS AND PREVIEWS

Please call the phone number listed with the theatre for timetables and ticket information.

ADULT ENTERTAINMENT
A new comedy by Elaine May, starring Danny Aiello and Jeannie Berlin, about porn actors who decide to make their own movie. Opens Dec. 11 at 8. (Variety Arts, 110 Third Ave. 239-6200.)

DINNER AT EIGHT
Gerald Gutierrez directs a new production of George S. Kaufman and Edna Ferber's 1932 play about a grand New York dinner party. Marian Seldes stars. In previews. (Vivian Beaumont, Lincoln Center. 239-6200.)

GONE HOME
Manhattan Theatre Club presents a play by John Corwin, directed by David Warren, about a young writer's homecoming. In previews. Opens Dec. 17 at 7:30. (City Center, 131 W. 55th St. 581-1212.)

HANK WILLIAMS: LOST HIGHWAY
Jason Petty plays the legendary country-and-western singer in a musical biography directed by Randal Myler. In previews. (Manhattan Ensemble Theatre, 55 Mercer St. 239-6200.)

IMAGINARY FRIENDS
A new play about the literary feud between Lillian Hellman and Mary McCarthy, starring Swoosie Kurtz and Cherry Jones. Written by Nora Ephron, with music by Marvin Hamlisch and lyrics by Craig Carnelia. Two previews on Dec. 11. Opens Dec. 12 at 6:30. (Barrymore, 243 W. 47th St. 239-6200.)

JOE AND BETTY
John Diehl and Annabelle Gurwitch play the title characters in Murray Mednick's drama about a stormy marriage, set in the Catskills in the nineteen-fifties, which has moved to one of Theatre Row's new venues, the Kirk Theatre. Opens Dec. 15 at 3. (410 W. 42nd St. 279-4200.)

PORTERPHILES
With the benediction of the Porter Trust, the Cole Porter expert Judy Brown has selected more than thirty of the songwriter's lesser-known ditties for the York Theatre Company, in a production directed by James Morgan, staged by Barry McNabb, and sung by Lynne Halliday, Ricky Russell, and Stephen Zinnato. In previews. (St. Peter's Church, Lexington Ave. at 54th St. 239-6200.)

A PURE GOSPEL CHRISTMAS
The Manhattan church singers Richard Bellizin, Arlene Frink, Darin Myers, and Debbie Otman join in a production directed by Leslie Dockery and produced by Eric Krebs, whose last collaboration was "Little Ham." Previews begin Dec. 12. Opens Dec. 17 at 8. (John Houseman, 450 W. 42nd St. 239-6200.)

S	M	T	W	T	F	S
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TARTUFFE
Joe Dowling directs the Richard Wilbur translation of Molière's play, with Brian Bedford, Henry Goodman, and J. Smith-Cameron. In previews. (Roundabout, 227 W. 42nd St. 719-1300.)

TOMMY TUNE: WHITE TIE AND TAILS
Joined by the Manhattan Rhythm Kings and a sixteen-member big band, the entertainer baptizes the Little Shubert Theatre with an evening of song-and-dance numbers set to the music of Irving Berlin, Gershwin, Cole Porter, the Beatles, and Fred Astaire. In previews. (422 W. 42nd St. 239-6200.)

OPENED RECENTLY

BARTENDERS
The portraits Louis Mustillo presents in his one-man show about life behind the bar are as bracing and bittersweet as a whiskey sour, even if they don't quite intoxicate. No Tom Cruise "Cocktail" capers here; Mustillo serves it straight up, playing six barkeeps (based on men he and his father met during their years tending bar) on a no-frills set—a bar, a table, and a chair. His talent for physical comedy and character work makes each role distinct, whether it's a stuttering Buffalo saloon owner, a former club bartender with H.I.V., or a tipsy barman, rambling on after hours about the joys of Christmas in New York. (John Houseman, 450 W. 42nd St. 206-1515.)

BETTY RULES
A kinetic alterna-rock musical, directed by Michael Greif ("Rent"), chronicling the nearly two-decade-long career of a real-life girl band called Betty and its members' battle to keep the group and their sanity intact on the road, at home, onstage, and even in therapy. (Zipper, 336 W. 37th St. 239-6200.)

BEWILDERNESS
In his ninety-minute routine, the genial, sleepy-eyed English comedian Bill Bailey deploys a mild, chatty brand of humor that creeps up on the audience, convulsing them by afterthought. (47th Street Theatre, 304 W. 47th St. 239-6200.)

BLISS
In this darkly comic three-character play by Ben Bettenbender, Jo-Lynne (Johanna Day) hires Chick (Rob Sedgwick), a gas-station attendant and ex-convict, to kill Curtis (Peter Jay Fernandez), the man who murdered her husband and got off scot-free. "Bliss" is more about rhetoric than about action, and the actors have a strong grip on the rhythm of Bettenbender's crackling dialogue. (Rattlestick, 224 Waverly Pl. 206-1515. Closes Dec. 22.)

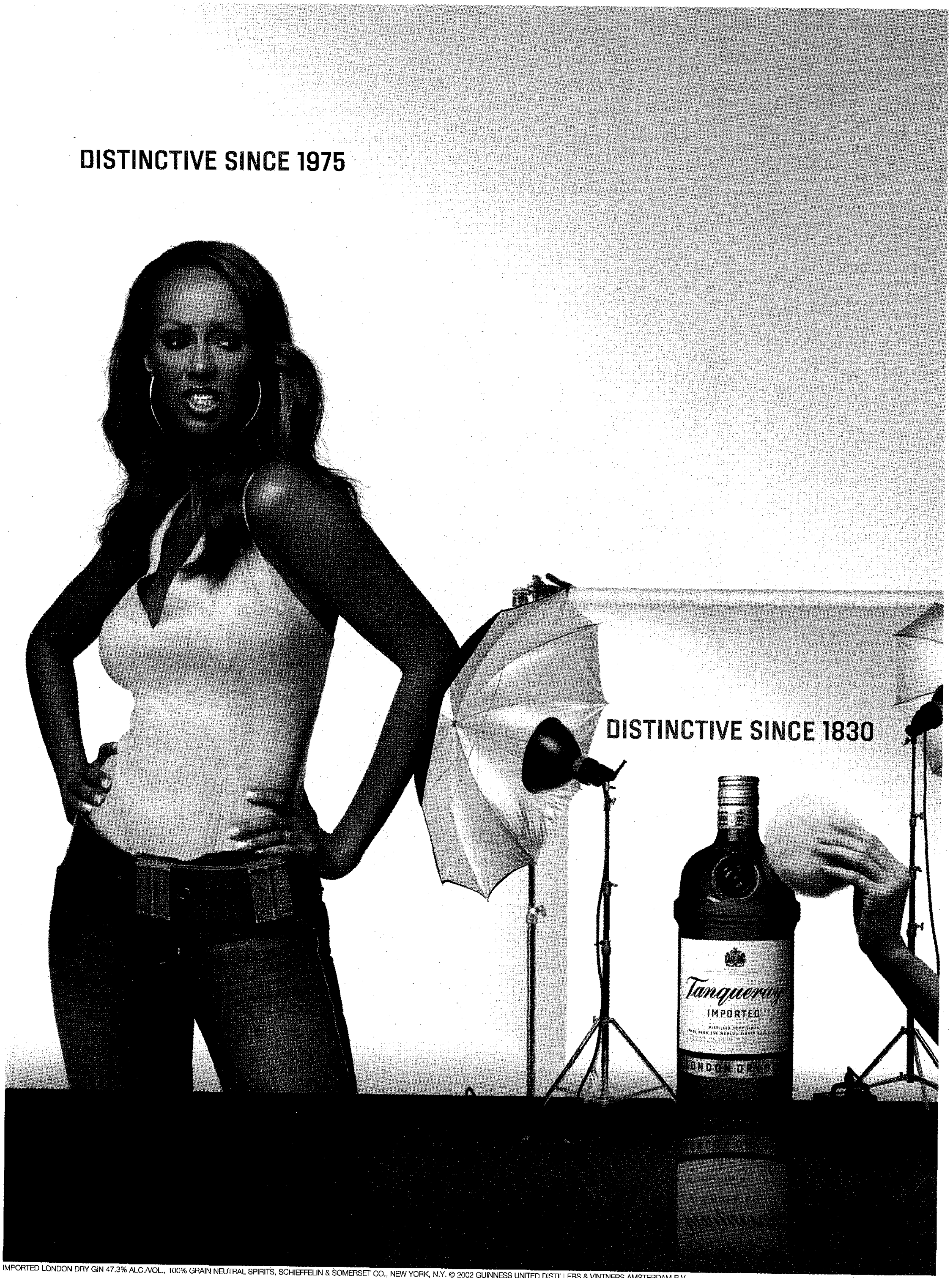
BLUE/ORANGE
At the outset of Joe Penhall's sharply funny new play, a young white psychiatrist consults his supervisor about whether he should send a young black psychiatric patient home. Their debate—over whether it's patronizing to consider the man sick in the first place—quickly spirals out of control. Penhall's script undercuts a lot of cant about race, psychiatry, power, and self-delusion, and Neil Pepe's deft direction magnifies the evening's theatrical and intellectual satisfactions. The characters are well drawn, and excellently acted, with Harold Perrineau, Jr., as the patient, Glenn Fitzgerald as the junior doctor, and Zeljko Ivanek as the mentor. (Atlantic, 336 W. 20th St. 239-6200. Closes Dec. 29.)

LA BOHÈME
Baz Luhrmann's production of Puccini's opera has arrived. (Broadway, 1681 Broadway, at 53rd St. 239-6200.)

BOSTON MARRIAGE
Kate Burton and Martha Plimpton chew the scenery in David Mamet's genteelly bawdy, mot-a-minute drawing-room comedy about two late-nineteenth-century lesbians, directed by Karen Kohlhaas. To echo the Mamet script: "Could such a Byzantine rodomontade succeed?" Yes, with reservations: the play is stilted but not unenjoyable—particularly for wordsmiths. (Public, 425 Lafayette St. 239-6200. Closes Dec. 22.)

CHASHAMALAND
Good old-fashioned comedy has returned to Times Square. Two new shows at Chashama sneak the delights of stick-on clown noses and slamming doors into the modern age without scrapping their old-time zing. "The Golden Age," conceived and directed by Joel Jeske (who scarily resembles Harold Lloyd), pays tribute to a vaudeville troupe onstage and off. Because the audience can see the machinations backstage, it's clear that neither the watchers nor the players are meant to take things too seriously—which makes the routines all the funnier. Meanwhile, "Happy Hour" is just that: an hour of frolic presented by three faux-hapless clowns (Ambrose Martos, Mark Gindick, and Matthew Morgan) who mix the naughtiness of the old Times Square with an elegy for a whoopee cushion and an Acme Bad Ass Kit (which comes with a leather jacket and safety goggles). (135 W. 42nd St. 631-5819.)

CHRISTMAS WITH THE CRAWFORDS
In this high-camp, low-budget holiday revue, Ethel Merman, Gloria Swanson, Carmen Miranda, et al. drop by Joan Crawford's mansion on Christmas Eve in 1944. The glamorous Joey Arias plays the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arc-browed siren, and Jason Scott—a muscular blur of blond hair, white tights, and red velvet—plays Christina, recoiling acrobatically from Mommie Dearest's air punches. Of the many cameos, the best are from Kate Botello (the lone woman in the cast), who looks and sounds like Judy Garland, and Chris March, who plays Shirley Temple and must weigh three hundred pounds. His lace-ankleted footfalls make Joan's velvet chaise longue bounce, and his rendition of "On the Good Ship Lollipop" wipes out the original. But Nicolas Ferrer's astonishing performance of "O Holy Night" (while dressed as Hattie McDaniel) has volume, heart, and a gorgeous, molten beauty—and shows that men in drag can produce moments of exaltation that transcend costume. (Producers Club II, 616 Ninth Ave. 206-1515.)

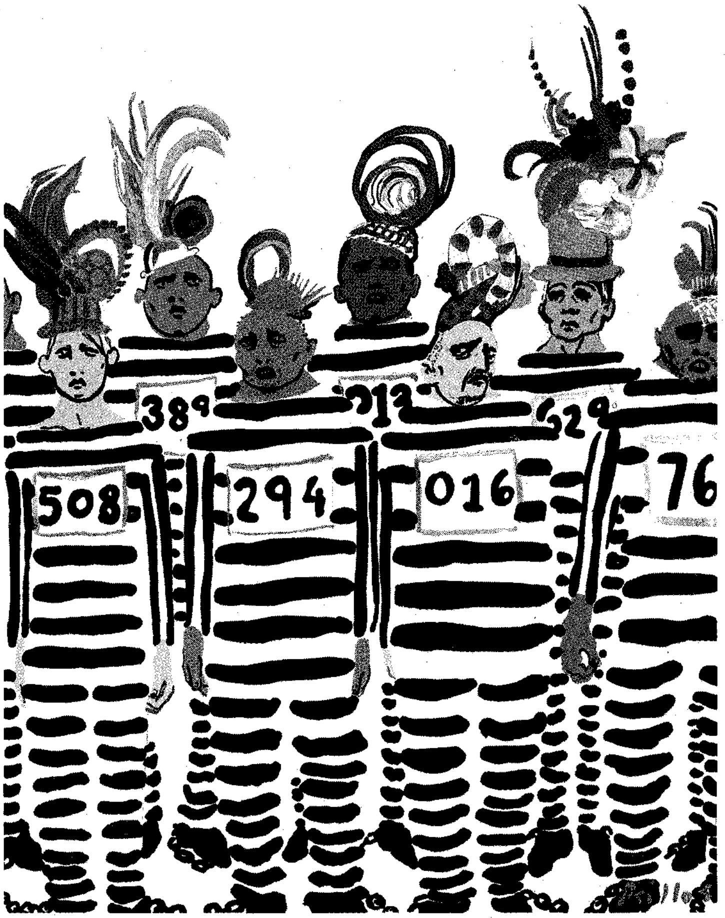
CLASS MOTHERS '68
In a new comedy by Eric H. Weinberger, Priscilla Lopez plays six different mothers of high-school seniors. Directed by Jeremy Dobrish. (Clurman, 410 W. 42nd St. 279-4200.)

CROWNS
Based on a book of portraits of black women in their church hats, Regina Taylor's new play includes gospel singing and features choreography by Ronald K. Brown. (Reviewed in this issue.) (Second Stage, 307 W. 43rd St. 246-4422.)

DANCE OF THE VAMPIRES
A musical based on the 1967 Roman Polanski film, starring Michael Crawford, with music by Jim Steinman and a book by David Ives, Mr. Steinman, and Michael Kunze. John Rando is the director. (Minskoff, 45th St. west of Broadway. 307-4100.)

DEBBIE DOES DALLAS
A saucy postmodern musical, adapted from the porn film, and well played by Sherie Rene Scott (as Debbie), Mary Catherine Garrison, Jon Patrick Walker, Paul Fitzgerald, and others. (Jane Street Theatre, 113 Jane St. 239-6200.)

DEMOCRACY IN ISLAM
In a drama by the Pakistani-American playwright Bina Sharif, members of an American Muslim family struggle with divorce, homosexuality, and fundamentalism. (Theatre for the New City, 155 First Ave. 254-1109.)



Caryl Churchill's "Far Away," starring Frances McDormand.

DEMETRIOS PSILLOS

FAR AWAY
In Caryl Churchill's thrilling fable, a not-too-distant totalitarian society is engaged in a war of all against all. Humans, animals, nations, insects, the elements—even gravity—make and break alliances, with bloody consequences. The show's vivid, nightmarish centerpiece, a fashion parade of the condemned, knocks the breath out of the audience. The exceptional cast includes Frances McDormand, Marin Ireland, and Chris Messina. The show is not to be missed. Directed by Stephen Daldry. (New York Theatre Workshop, 79 E. 4th St. 239-6200.)

FLOWER DRUM SONG
Part fashion show, part night-club act, part hymn to Asian-American diversity, David Henry Hwang's update of the 1958 Rodgers and Hammerstein show, set in San Francisco's Chinatown, works far better than the original. With snazzy direction and choreography by Robert Longbottom and vivacious dancing by Sandra Allen. (11/4/02) (Virginia, 245 W. 52nd St. 239-6200.)

THE FOURTH WALL
There's applause for the politics and big yuks for the gags in A. R. Gurney's updated version of his 1992 play, stylishly directed by David Saint. While denouncing the decay of the government, the environment, and the theatre, Gurney manages to soundly entertain—with the aid of four brilliant performers (Sandy Duncan, Charles Kimbrough, David Pittu, and Susan Sullivan). (Primary Stages, 353 W. 45th St. 333-4052. Closes Dec. 22.)

FRANKIE AND JOHNNY IN THE CLAIR DE LUNE
Edie Falco and Stanley Tucci star in Terrence McNally's sentimental two-character study about a man and a woman marginalized by life. Joe Mantello directs. (Belasco, 111 W. 44th St. 239-6200.)

THE GENERAL FROM AMERICA
Like "Schoolhouse Rock" minus the rock, Richard Nelson's Revolutionary War drama about the traitor Benedict Arnold (Corin Redgrave) combines a history lesson with entertainment, stinting the latter. In a tar-dark theatre, lit chiefly by candles, the audience strains to catch the lesson unfolding before them—muted flickers of pewter and steel, the rustle of wool and wig, and an echo of alehouses behind dim doors. It feels like spying on a memory of another century. With Nicholas Kepros as Sir Henry Clinton, the commander of the British Army in America, who despised Arnold, and Paul Anthony McGrane as Sir Henry's beloved protégé, John Andre. (Lucille Lortel, 121 Christopher St. 239-6200.)

HAIRSPRAY
This musical-comedy version of the 1988 John Waters movie takes off from the opening number and never loses its momentum. In Baltimore in 1962, the rotund teen Tracy Turnblad (Marissa Jaret Winokur) wants to dance, make out with the best-looking boy in town, and integrate "The Corny Collins Show," a local teen-dance TV program. With the great Harvey Fierstein, plucked, shaved, and padded, as Tracy's mother, Edna Turnblad. (9/2/02) (Neil Simon, 250 W. 52nd St. 307-4100.)

HENRY V
In the Jean Cocteau Repertory's production of Shakespeare's epic war story, the battle is fought not on the grounds of Agincourt but on the battlefields of Vietnam—complete with bamboo sets, frighteningly real sound effects, and anti-war sixties rock. The players, led by Jason Crowl as Henry, handle the language of the script with terrific ease and ably convey the vanity of the kings who wage war and the brashness of the young soldiers who die for them. A timely and provocative piece, directed by David Fuller. (Bouwerie Lane Theatre, 330 Bowery, at Bond St. 677-0060.)

HOLLYWOOD ARMS
Carol Burnett's lightly fictionalized memoir, written with her late daughter, Carrie Hamilton, stars Linda Lavin and is directed by Harold Prince. (11/18/02) (Cort, 138 W. 48th St. 239-6200.)

MAN OF LA MANCHA
If hearing "The Impossible Dream" four times without intermission is your idea of a good night out, then "Man of La Mancha" is for you. Superbly staged by Jonathan Kent and featuring a sensational set by Paul Brown that has more tricks than a circus pony, no amount of proficient talent (Brian Stokes Mitchell is the nutty knight of faith, and Mary Elizabeth Mastrantonio is the toothsome tart Aldonza) and no amount of high tech prowess can disguise the fact that this Don Quixote–Sancho Panza cartoon is romantic kitsch. (Martin Beck, 302 W. 45th St. 239-6200.)

MEDEA
Fiona Shaw returns to New York in the acclaimed Abbey Theatre production of the Euripides play, directed by Deborah Warner, which played recently at BAM. (Brooks Atkinson, 256 W. 47th St. 307-4100.)

THE MERCY SEAT
MCC Theatre presents a new play by Neil LaBute, about life after 9/11, starring Liev Schreiber and Sigourney Weaver. (Acorn, 410 W. 42nd St. 279-4200.)

MOVIN' OUT
Twyla Tharp's show about small-town teen-agers coming of age during the Vietnam War era is set to twenty-seven songs by Billy Joel. The band is terrific, and the dancers—above all, John Selya as the hero, Eddie—are positively on fire. (11/4/02) (Richard Rodgers, 226 W. 46th St. 307-4100.)

OUR TOWN
Paul Newman returns to Broadway, playing the Stage Manager in the Thornton Wilder classic. Directed by James Naughton. (Reviewed in this issue.) (Booth, 222 W. 45th St. 239-6200.)

THE ROAR OF THE GREASEPAINT, THE SMELL OF THE CROWD
Musicals Tonight! presents a revival of the 1965 musical by Leslie Bricusse and Anthony Newley. (14th Street Y, 344 E. 14th St. 362-5620.)

RUSSELL SIMMONS' DEF POETRY JAM ON BROADWAY
The hip-hop legend has brought together spoken-word stylists from his HBO show and from the national poetry-slam circuit to create an exuberant, defiant production. The rap bards deliver poems that are part autobiography, part social commentary—addressing everything from love, America, racism, and terrorism to Krispy Kreme doughnuts. (Longacre, 220 W. 48th St. 239-6200.)

SALOMÉ
Al Pacino is Herod, Dianne Wiest is Herod's wife, David Strathairn is John the Baptist, and Marisa Tomei is the title character, in a staged reading of the Oscar Wilde play, directed by Estelle Parsons. (St. Ann's Warehouse, 38 Water St., Brooklyn.

SAY GOODNIGHT, GRACIE
Frank Gorshin is George Burns in Rupert Holmes's touching one-man tribute to the unsinkable comic and his more-than-a-sidekick wife, Gracie Allen. It's not just a showcase for one man; it's a showcase for an era. (Helen Hayes, 240 W. 44th St. 239-6200.)

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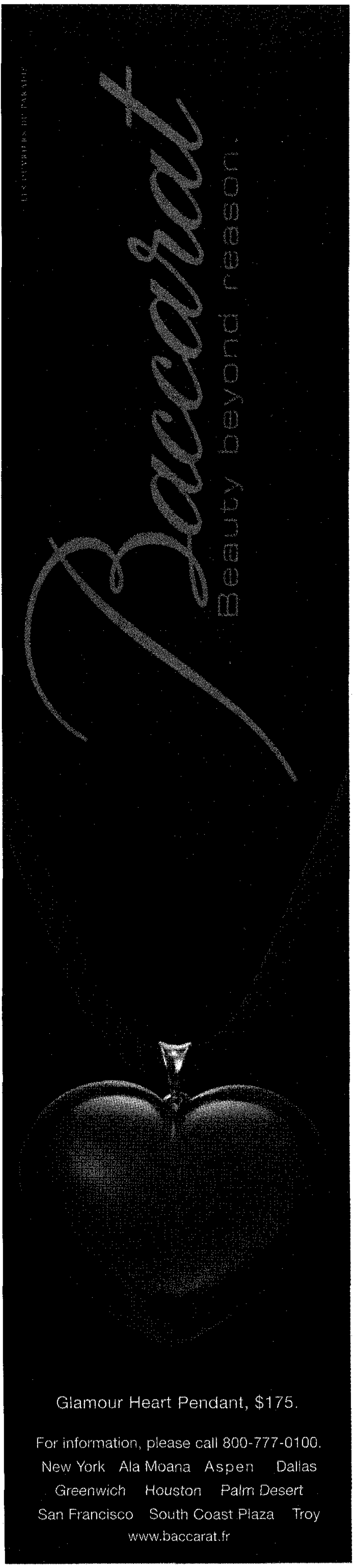

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THE SECRET OF STEEP RAVINES
A girl explores the mysteries of an old family house, in a play directed by Rachel Dickstein and written by Barbara Wiechmann. (P.S. 122, 140 First Ave., at 9th St. 477-5288.)

THE TEMPEST
The Pearl's season continues with Shakespeare's fantasy, directed by Padraic Lillis, with Rachel Botchan as Miranda and Robert Hock as Prospero. (80 St. Marks Pl. 598-9802.)

TUESDAYS WITH MORRIE
Based on Mitch Albom's best-selling book, the play is a love song to a wise old professor who taught an unreflective younger man how to feel. Alvin Epstein plays the mentor—Morrie Schwartz—with wit and heart, and John Tenney is touching as Mitch, the brusque mentee. Directed by David Esbjornson. (Minetta Lane Theatre, 18 Minetta Lane, east of Sixth Ave., between W. 3rd and Bleecker Sts. 307-4100.)

UNREAL CITY
The Epiphany Theatre Company has converted seven "Lives" columns from the *Times Magazine* into an evening of short plays. Through Dec. 21. (Chelsea Playhouse, 125 W. 22nd St. 206-1515.)

YENTL
The venerable Folksbiene Yiddish Theatre offers a charming production of the play by Leah Napolin and Isaac Bashevis Singer about a young woman who wants to study Torah so much that she disguises herself as a man. Eleanor Reissa, as the title character, leads a strong cast. In Yiddish, with simultaneous translation. (P.C.M.H., 344 W. 35th St. 307-4100.)

DANCE

NEW YORK CITY BALLET
In Balanchine's "Nutcracker," the Christmas party is gemütlich, the nightmare scary, the tree tall, and Candyland exactly what it should be: a child's dream of heaven. Tchaikovsky wrote the music at the peak of his powers as a fabulist, and Balanchine's imagination rose to meet it. (New York State Theatre, Lincoln Center. 870-5570. Dec. 11-12 and Dec. 17 at 6, Dec. 13 at 8, Dec. 14 at 2 and 8, and Dec. 15 at 1 and 5.)

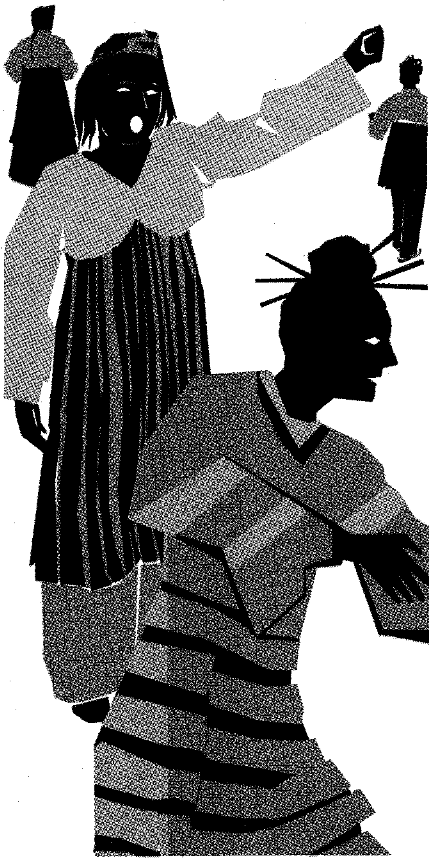
"THE HARD NUT"
"SEE the rat queen's horrible mutant offspring!" read the poster at the première, in 1991. That's the tone—hilariously, comic-bookishly crass—of the first act of Mark Morris's "Nutcracker" update. The Christmas party is set in the nineteen-seventies, with bell-bottoms and a dancing Barbie (who gets her arm torn off by a robot at the end of her number). But in the "Waltz of the Snowflakes," as men and women in tutus hurl fistfuls of snow, acridness meets sweetness, and the ballet tips over, becoming what all good "Nutcracker"s are: a serious meditation on love. Once it was alternative, but now "The Hard Nut" is a classic in its own right. (BAM's Howard Gilman Opera House, 30 Lafayette Ave. 718-636-4100. Dec. 17 at 7. Through Dec. 22.)

ALVIN AILEY AMERICAN DANCE THEATRE
The company première of Ohad Naharin's "Black Milk" has its début this week as the City Center season continues. In the mysterious, disquieting dance, created by the Israeli choreographer in 1991, five men daub their faces and bodies with mud, which they scoop from a pail that they pass among themselves. Then they scuttle backward like crabs, or clamp onto each other in uneasy duets, or just watch from a wary distance. Naharin says, "The dance creates a place that is cold and warm, empty and old—things you associate with the desert." ♦ Dec. 11 at 8: "Memoria," "Treading," "Cry," and "Grace." ♦ Dec. 12 at 8: "Dance at the Gym," "Shelter," and "The Winter in Lisbon." ♦ Dec. 13 at 8: "Following the Subtle Current Upstream," "Sweet Bitter Love," "Black Milk," and "Revelations." ♦ Dec. 14 at 2: "Prayers from the Edge," "Love Songs," "Treading," and "The Winter in Lisbon." ♦ Dec. 14 at 8: "Following the Subtle Current Upstream," "Sweet Bitter Love," "Black Milk," and "Revelations." ♦ Dec. 15 at 3: "Dance at the Gym," "Treading," "Black Milk," and "Revelations." ♦ Dec. 15 at 7:30: "Grace," "Shelter," and "The Winter in Lisbon." (131 W. 55th St. 581-1212. Through Jan. 5.)

BALLET HISPANICO
The company performs new and repertory works by Pedro Ruiz ("Cecilia," "Guajira") and Ann Reinking ("Slices") and other pieces, including Ramón Oller's "Bésame." (Joyce Theatre, 175 Eighth Ave., at 19th St. 242-0800. Dec. 11-13 at 8, Dec. 14 at 2 and 8, and Dec. 15 at 2 and 7:30.)

IMPROVISATION FESTIVAL/NY
Among the events occurring during the festival's final week is "Blind Date," an experiment in living in the moment performed by dancers who are all approaching middle age: Ishmael Houston-Jones, Yvonne Meier, and Tere O'Connor. Houston-Jones, a graceful, big-boned dancer, belongs to the wing-it school of improvisation. Meier, a spitfire, usually works with a loose game plan. "For example, 'Catapult to the wall and then tip,'" she says. "Or, 'Ugly and then ridiculous.'" But O'Connor, who dances with precision even when he galumphs, doesn't generally improvise—not in public, anyway. "I'm scared to death," he says. "I've thought of setting my part and only pretending I'm doing improv. Or maybe I'll just talk, now that we're so old." Also on the program are the dancer Katie Duck, with the violinist Mary Oliver, and the dance group Miguel Gutierrez and the Powerful People. (Kitchen, 512 W. 19th St. 255-5793. Dec. 14 at 8. For complete festival schedule and venue information, call 598-0551. Through Dec. 15.)

"ANTIGONE: THE TIN CAN TIED TO HER OWN DAMN TAIL"
Big Dance Theatre's nimble production of Mac Wellman's riff on the Sophocles tragedy uses a dance logic of quick, resonant transition to travel from silliness to elegy. Rebecca Wisocky plays a grouchy and perplexed Creon; Didi O'Connell's Antigone is a quiet, world-weary mystery. Directed by Paul Lazar and Annie-B Parson. (Dance Theatre Workshop, 219 W. 19th St. 924-0077. Dec. 12-14 at 7 and Dec. 15 at 2. Through Dec. 22.)



Didi O'Connell is Antigone and Rebecca Wisocky is Creon in Mac Wellman's update of the Sophocles drama, now at Dance Theatre Workshop.

"THE BOTTOMLAND"
Doug Varone's dancers create a fable of backwoods America, set in and around Kentucky's Mammoth Caves and performed to music by Patty Loveless and Gaétan Leboeuf. The dancers move with fluidity and submission, falling to the ground emphatically and rising again renewed. Geography, Varone shows, is their trap and their refuge. (Ohio, 66 Wooster St. 279-4200. Dec. 11-13 at 8, Dec. 14 at 7:30 and 10, Dec. 15 at 4 and 7, and Dec. 17 at 8. Through Dec. 22.)

"BALKAN DREAMS"
The raucous, twelve-piece brass band Zlatne Uste blasts infectious rhythms that would make anyone want to dance. In a Danspace Project production, Tina Croll has used them to inspire her six-person modern troupe and a crowd of Balkan folk dancers to skip, leap, spin, and turn cartwheels. Wild romps alternate with contemplative sections set to Turkish-tinged melodies (played on the lutelike tamboura) or to haunting Macedonian harmonies. Well aware that folk dancing can be more fun to do than to watch, Croll has balanced her program with spatially complex modern choreography, and at the end she invites her audience onstage, because "dancing to this music is sheer delight." (St. Mark's In-the-Bouwerie, Second Ave. at 10th St. 674-8194. Dec. 12-14 at 8:30 and Dec. 15 at 7:30.)

"THE YORKVILLE NUTCRACKER"
In this homegrown adaptation of the ballet, set in 1895 at Gracie Mansion, Central Park, and the New York Botanical Garden, the Christmas party is hosted by Mayor William L. Strong, and Teddy Roosevelt—then the local police commissioner—is one of the party guests. Performed by Dances Patrelle. (Kaye Playhouse, Hunter College, Park Ave. at 68th St. 772-4448. Dec. 13 at 7, Dec. 14 at 2 and 7, and Dec. 15 at 1 and 6.)

NIGHT LIFE
CONCERTS

MARTIN SEXTON
The pop-radio people haven't found a spot in the rotation for this singer-songwriter, but in a perfect world they would, and soon. Sexton's complex songs come complete with basement blues harmony, gospel revelation, polka chords, and the occasional psychedelic guitar lick. Last year, Sexton—whose voice is always interesting and often gorgeous—logged some hundred thousand miles on the road playing stripped-down shows to fans who want what radio won't give them. (Town Hall, 123 W. 43rd St. 840-2824. Dec. 12-13 at 8.)

JAZZ AT LINCOLN CENTER
Benny Goodman, the King of Swing, will be well served by the clarinettists Bob Wilber and Paquito D'Rivera. For its part, the Lincoln Center Jazz Orchestra gets to tear into those timeless Fletcher Henderson charts. Don't expect dancing in the aisles, but things may heat up when "Sing, Sing, Sing" is inevitably trotted out. (Alice Tully Hall. 721-6500. Dec. 12 and Dec. 14 at 8.)

DIO
The diminutive screecher Ronnie James Dio launched this eponymous band in the early eighties and quickly rose to the top of the high-volume heap. Specializing in shamelessly Tolkienesque imagery, Dio's particular blend of armor-clad histrionics has since fallen out of style, but as long as there are dragons to be slain and broadswords to be wielded, he shall endure. (Roseland, 239 W. 52nd St. 307-7171. Dec. 13 at 7:30.)

TOM PETTY
One of the more conventional bands to blossom during the heyday of New Wave, Petty and his Heartbreakers have honed the rough edges off their music over the last two decades, evolving into one of the tightest outfits in rock music. On his latest release, "The Last DJ," Petty sticks it to the record industry, railing against greedy executives, artists who sell out, and mediocrity. (Madison Square Garden. 307-7171. Dec. 13 at 7:30.)

THE DOWNTOWN MESSIAH
Richard Barone leads a twenty-member chorus through an abbreviated version of the holiday masterpiece, with guest soloists Dar Williams,

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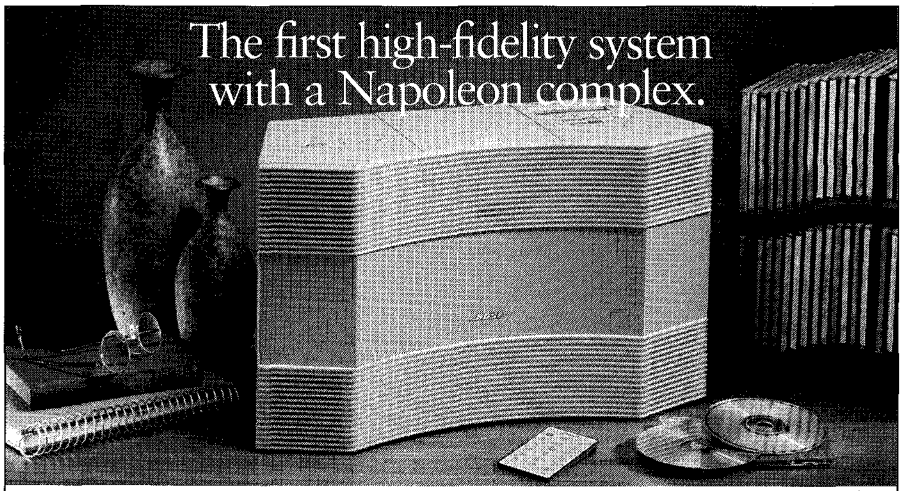

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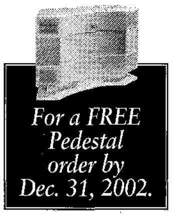

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David Johansen, Syd Straw, Marshall Crenshaw, and others. (Winter Garden, World Financial Center, Battery Park City. *945-0505. Dec. 17 at 6:30.)*

CLUBS

Musicians and night-club proprietors live complicated lives; it's advisable to call ahead to confirm engagements.

B. B. KING BLUES CLUB & GRILL
237 W. 42nd St. (997-4144)—Dec. 13: If you thought such instruments as the tuba, saxophone, trumpet, and trombone were only good for serious, contemplative improvisational jazz, then you'll be knocked off your chair by the powerful funk of New Orleans's **ReBirth Brass Band.** This ensemble comes to party, which is not to say its jazz roots aren't firmly established, and its nearly all-horn approach will make you wonder what a guitar and bass are for. Dec. 17: More renowned for album covers adorned with axe-wielding barbarians (courtesy of the celebrated fantasy artist Frank Frazetta) than for their music, the hirsute Southern-rock/metal pioneers **Molly Hatchet** continue flirtin' with disaster.

BOTTOM LINE
15 W. 4th St., at Mercer St. (228-6300)—Dec. 13-14: The **Downtown Messiah** (see Concerts).

BOWERY BALLROOM
6 Delancey St. (533-2111)—Dec. 13: The **Mooney Suzuki** are a New York quartet who practice a rollicking brand of sweaty garage rock with obvious nods to such old-school proto-punks as the MC5 and the Stooges. Dec. 14: Mining the fractured rhythms, angular guitars, and skewed funk of British post-punk (most notably that of the Gang of Four), the **Rapture** can be accused of being gratuitously retro, but they at least revive a less embarrassing chapter of the eighties.

FEZ
380 Lafayette St. (533-7000)—Dec. 11 and Dec. 13-14: *The cultural archeologists in* **Loser's Lounge** dig through the back catalogue of Simon and Garfunkel. Dec. 18: The singer-songwriter **David Poe** rings in the holidays. The **Mingus Big Band** still packs them in every Thursday. Dining.

IRVING PLAZA
17 Irving Pl., at 15th St. (777-6800)—Dec. 14: **Marianne Faithfull.** More than two decades after the exquisitely abrasive "Broken English" proved that she was something far more interesting than a former Rolling Stones groupie, Faithfull has maintained a semi-distinguished career as a raconteur and chanteuse. Her latest effort, "Kissin Time," features collaborations with Beck, Billy Corgan, and Pulp's Jarvis Cocker.

JOE'S PUB
425 Lafayette St. (539-8777)—Dec. 17: **Laura Cantrell** may have been born in Nashville, but she has spent half her life in New York City, where as the host of WFMU's "Radio Thrift Shop" she has tried to bring a little country comfort to her adoptive home. Cantrell is also a talented performer; she'll be performing songs from her latest release, "When the Roses Bloom Again."

KNITTING FACTORY
74 Leonard St., between Broadway and Church St. (219-3055)—Dec. 12-13: **Kelly Joe Phelps** earned his reputation by playing the slide guitar with the speed and facility of a jazz musician, but he's been making his bravest, most revealing music ever since he began to strum. Don't be surprised if his quick fingers spend more time tightening the nuts on his harmonica rack than floating over his guitar strings. Dec. 14: **Mary Lou Lord,** perhaps the world's most successful subway busker.

L'AMOUR
1545 63rd St., Brooklyn (718-837-9506)—Dec. 14: The roundly maligned white rapper **Vanilla Ice,** flying squarely in the face of universal derision, continues to seek redemption as a reinvented practitioner of rap-metal music. His perseverance is admirable, but his future remains doubtful.

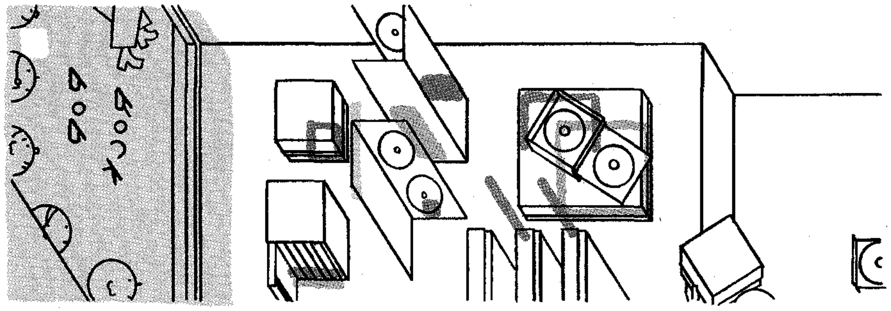
MERCURY LOUNGE
217 E. Houston St. (260-4700)—Dec. 11: The *members of* **VHS or Beta** *have no doubt about* what format of music they prefer. The Louisville, Kentucky, quartet lands solidly on the side of disco. But it's vintage dance music with a twist: by taking the earnest indie-rock sensibility of its home town into the strobe-lit, mirror-ball-laden clubs of the seventies, the band emerges with a refreshingly fun, guitar-filled sound. And thanks to their being more than twenty years behind the times, there's no velvet rope between you and the beats.

NORTHSIX
66 N. 6th St., Williamsburg (718-599-5103)—Dec. 13-14: Like an inconspicuous middle child, Seattle's amiably sloppy **Mudhoney** never made quite the splash that their flannel-clad peers in Nirvana, Pearl Jam, and Soundgarden did. They might have lacked the raw angst, pathos, and musical chops of those bands, but Mudhoney was an integral force in the nineties grunge scene, and they continue their frenzied guitar clamor to this day.

SOUTHPAW
125 Fifth Ave., Park Slope (718-230-0236)—Dec. 12: Gritty Irish rock with the **Prodigals.** Dec. 13: The madcap Nashville band **Los Straitjackets** break out their colorful Mexican wrestling masks and their trademark exuberant surf rock for a holiday show.

MUSIC NOTES

Thinking Inside the Box: Good Things in Slightly Smaller Packages



LAURENT CILLUFFO

The holiday season always brings lavish boxed sets from record labels looking to separate consumers from their cash; this year the economic climate—and the products—are somewhat subdued. While store shelves will be swaybacked beneath such dropsical offerings as the six-disk **"Sinatra in Hollywood 1940-1964"** (Reprise), the thirteen-disk **"Maurizio Pollini Edition"** (Universal), and the twenty-disk **"Complete Miles Davis at Montreux 1973-1991"** (Sony), most of the boxed sets demonstrate an admirable modesty.

Pop: The brightest light of the season belongs to the new-traditionalist country star Dwight Yoakam, whose four-CD retrospective, **"Reprise Please Baby"** (Warner/Reprise), includes his biggest hits, his always eclectic covers (including honky-tonk versions of Queen's "Crazy Little Thing Called Love" and Cheap Trick's "I Want You to Want Me"), and rare demos and live recordings. Rod Stewart's early career has been the subject of so much critical hyperbole that it's easy to forget just how compelling a singer he once was. **"Reason to Believe"** (Mercury) collects his first five albums, from "The Rod Stewart Album," from 1969, to "Smiler," from 1974. This means, of course, that the set includes the 1971 LP "Every Picture Tells a Story," one of the crown jewels of the rock era: "Maggie May," written by Stewart himself, is a standard, and his cover of the Temptations' "(I Know) I'm Losing You" makes even the epochal original pale in comparison.

Feeling mellow? Try **"The Carpenters: The Essential Collection"** (A&M), although four CDs of the Carpenters may be about three more CDs of the Carpenters than anyone needs, especially when the song selection is questionable. (The set has all the obvious choices, from "We've Only Just Begun" to "Sing," but lacks ambitious album tracks like "Crescent Noon" and "Another Song.") There's also **"Only Time: The Collection"** (Reprise), a four-CD collection of Enya's multiplatinum elevator music.

Feeling less mellow? Iron Maiden's **"Eddie's Archive"** (EMI) comes sealed inside an ornate tin casket festooned with the fanged visage of the band's undead mascot. Or you could try **"Twenty Years of Dischord,"** *which tells the story of the* idealistic Washington, D.C., company that became the template for countless independent record labels. This set culls favorites by such groups as Dag Nasty, the Nation of Ulysses, and Fugazi and includes a trove of less well-known material and some archival video footage.

Roots: The four-disk set **"When the Sun Goes Down: The Secret History of Rock & Roll"** (Bluebird) uncovers R. & B. and blues rarities from the twenties, thirties, forties, and fifties, songs that eventually paved the way for rock music. **"The Acoustic Folk Box"** (Topic) collects folk music of the British Isles, while **"The Best of the Bluegrass Tradition"** (Tradition) sets murder ballads alongside hill-country instrumentals. And **"Complete Recordings of Sam Cooke with the Soul Stirrers"** (Specialty) looks in on one of soul music's greatest singers during his gospel apprenticeship.

Jazz: Teddy Wilson once said of the pianist Art Tatum that he hit a home run each time he played. The short-lived but immensely influential guitarist Charlie Christian has the same effect, especially as you delve into the four-CD set **"The Genius of the Electric Guitar"** (Sony). You can marvel over Christian's astonishing originality, but the immediate joy lies in his miraculous melodic gifts and rhythmic freedom. John Coltrane's **"Legacy"** (Impulse!) begs the question "Another Coltrane boxed set?" Compiled by his son Ravi, himself an accomplished saxophonist, this four-disk set surprisingly justifies its existence. Working with such themes as "Elvin and Trane" and "Harmonic and Melodic," the disks map out Coltrane's development, touching on the saxophonist's prescient earlier work with Miles Davis and Thelonious Monk, his ambitious Prestige and Atlantic recordings, his "Classic Quartet" performances with the drummer Elvin Jones and the pianist McCoy Tyner, and the experiments of his last years.

JAZZ AND STANDARDS

ALGONQUIN HOTEL
59 W. 44th St. (840-6800)—The cabaret icon **Andrea Marcovicci,** currently at work in the woody nook known as the Oak Room, may not always have a dulcet tone, but her masterly interpretive skills and her charming way with an anecdote more than compensate for the rough spots in her delivery. She's performing the can't-lose love songs of Cole Porter through Jan. 11.

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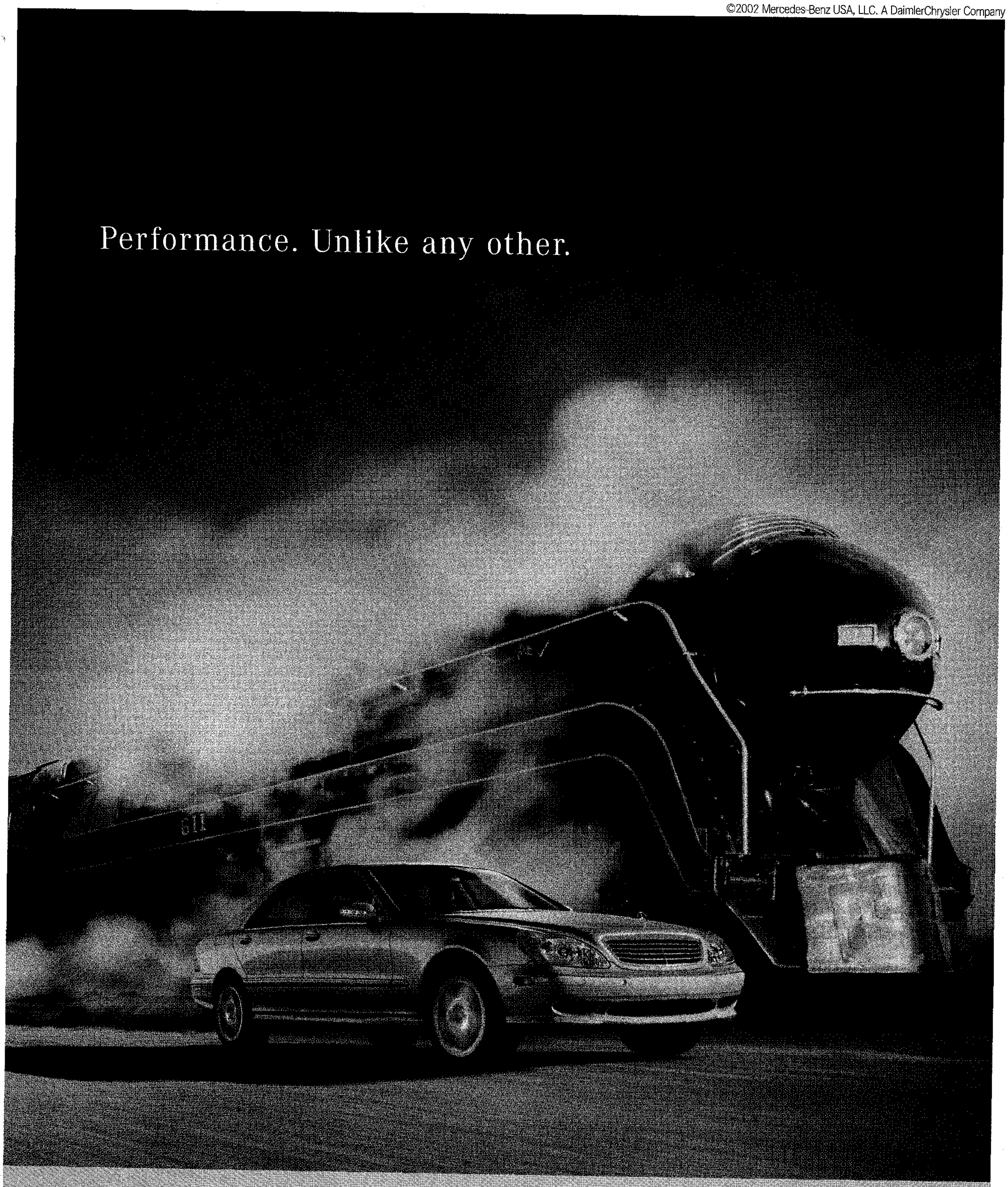
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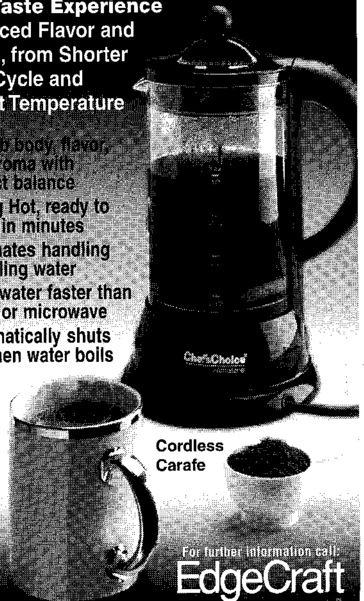

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BLUE NOTE
131 W. 3rd St., near Sixth Ave. (475-8592)—Through Dec. 15: The **Oscar Peterson** quartet. At the peak of his powers, essentially from the fifties through the eighties, Peterson often sounded like four pianists at once. Illness in the nineties left him impaired—now he sounds like only two.

CARLYLE HOTEL
Madison Ave. at 76th St. (744-1600)—The Café Carlyle, a snug, windowless enclave in the doorman district, features discreet waiters, wraparound murals, and the magisterially puckish **Bobby Short** and his mini big band. Ever the showman, Short delivers a choice slate of Depression-era show tunes with boundless enthusiasm, his trademark razor-sharp timing, a broad smile, and animated eyebrows. He may be a paragon of sophistication, but the high point of the show comes from lower precincts as he closes with a resounding rendition of Wesley (Sox) Wilson's party anthem, made famous by Bessie Smith, "Gimme a Pigfoot." ♦ Across the hall, in Bemelmans Bar, the **Loston Harris** trio is in attendance.

IRIDIUM
1650 Broadway, at 51st St. (582-2121)—Through Dec. 15: The **Ron Carter** quartet. Modern acoustic bassists everywhere can thank Carter for putting their instrument on the map. After high-profile experience that found him playing, either live or in the studio, with practically every major jazz figure of the past forty years, Carter is now as recognizable a name as the giants he's worked for. Mondays belong to the electric-guitar innovator **Les Paul.**

JAZZ STANDARD
116 E. 27th St. (576-2232)—Dec. 12: The **Josh Roseman Group.** Roseman, an in-demand new-jazz trombonist heard for the most part below Fourteenth Street, moves uptown for a night. Dec. 13-15: The spirit of the Argentine tango master Astor Piazzola is evoked in the ensemble of his former pianist **Pablo Ziegler,** himself a stirring composer and bandleader. Two wind players with the appropriate flair for the sensual and dramatic, **Paquito D'Rivera** and **James Carter,** will make guest appearances. Dining.

JOE'S PUB
425 Lafayette St. (539-8777)—Dec. 16: The opulent, gorgeous melodies that Billy Strayhorn constructed either by himself or in collaboration with Duke Ellington give singers plenty of choice material. **Darius de Haas** knows his way around these gems, having already laid claim to a healthy chunk of them on his fine release "Day Dream: Variations on Strayhorn."

VILLAGE VANGUARD
178 Seventh Ave. S., at 11th St. (255-4037)—**Chris Potter's** association with Dave Holland has brought him wider visibility, but the saxophonist has been a talent to watch for more than a decade now. If his own albums haven't yet caught the zesty abandon of his best playing, in performance, Potter proves himself an authoritative voice to be reckoned with. He's here with his quartet through Dec. 15. The **Vanguard Jazz Orchestra** holds sway on Mondays.

ART
MUSEUMS AND LIBRARIES

METROPOLITAN MUSEUM
Fifth Ave. at 82nd St. (879-5500)—When Winston Churchill said, "Let us brace ourselves to our duties," he may not have meant "Let us tighten the corset in our pink organza gown." But in the years leading up to the Second World War, the Duke and Duchess of Windsor were doing just that, leading a life of extravagant frivolity across the English Channel in Paris. **"Blithe Spirit: The Windsor Set"** presents French couture, including fashions by Lanvin, Chanel, and Schiaparelli, created for British café society between 1935 and 1940. Most of the clothes are nothing more than beautifully tailored evening wear, but certain designers manage to slip a little subversiveness into their creations, as in the Mainbocher dress that portends impending chaos through layers of faded and shredded tulle and lace. Through Feb. 9. ♦ Tucked away in a gallery at the back of the museum's Lehman Wing is a collection of thirty-five small-scale Impressionist and post-

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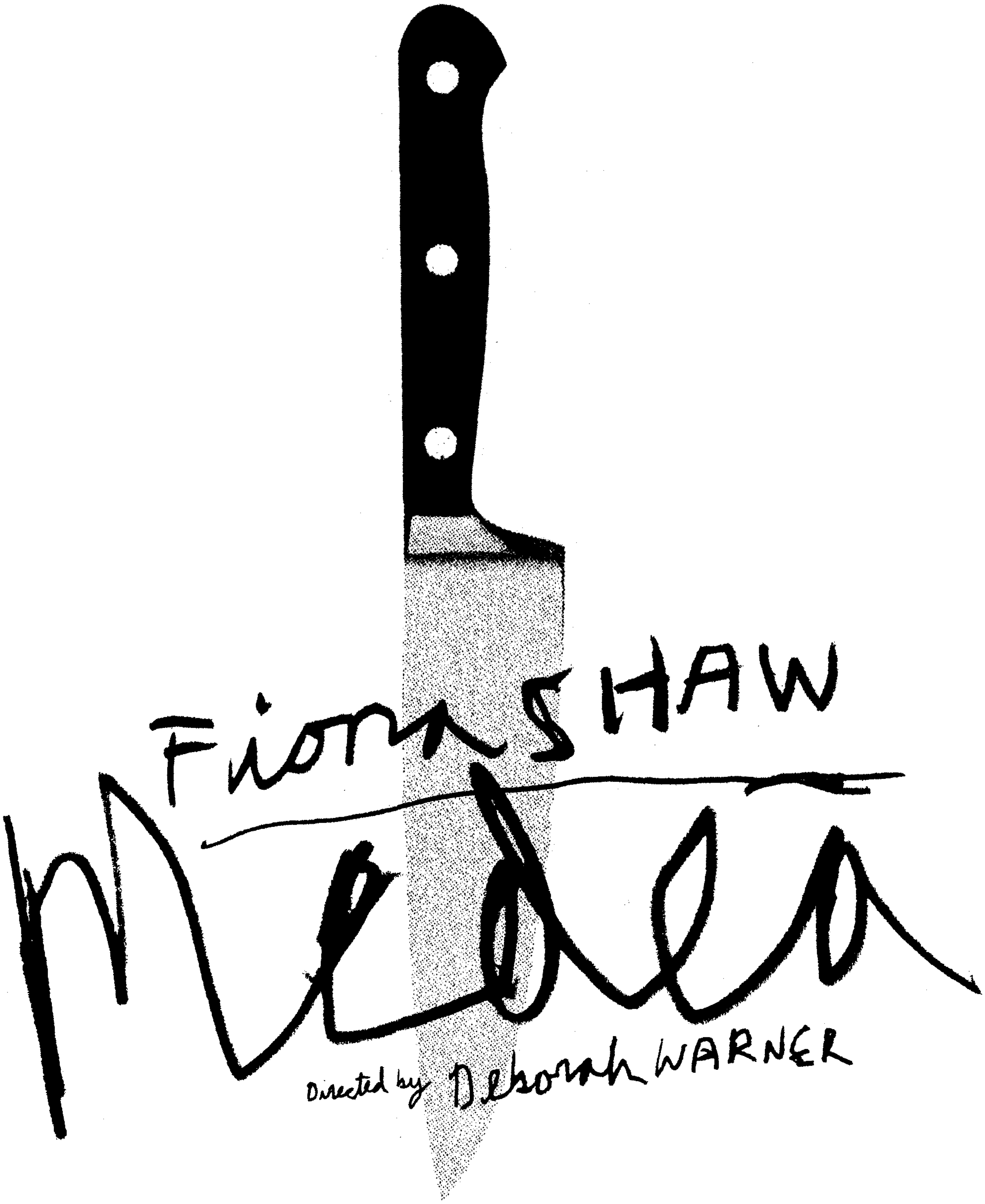
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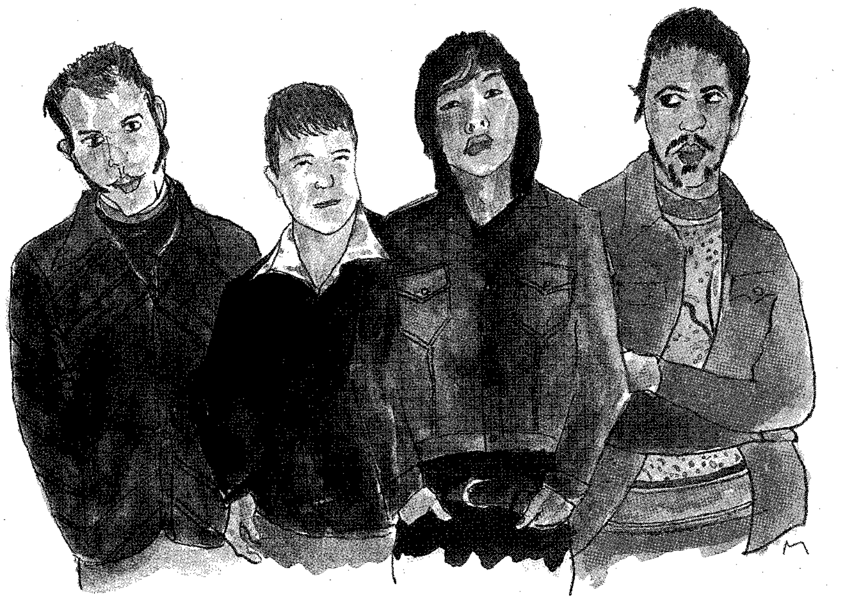
Impressionist paintings from the private collection of the late philanthropist Janice Levin. There are guaranteed crowd-pleasers—Monet's garden at Argenteuil, Renoir's zaftig bather, Bonnard's alfresco lunch, Morisot's rosy-cheeked nymphs—and also some surprises. A pre-Moulin Rouge Toulouse-Lautrec depicts a day trip to the countryside with his portrait of three friends lounging in high grass as a little dog looks on from a slight distance (a surrogate for the artist himself?). Through Feb. 9. ♦ Théodore Chassériau (1819-56) was an unqualified success in his own lifetime. He was apprenticed to Ingres at the age of twelve, won his first medal in a Paris Salon at eighteen, and then, at twenty-seven, jilted the neoclassic ideal for a lusty Romanticism à la Delacroix, whom he followed to North Africa. Then he died young—his first bad career move. Soon afterward, the Paris Commune of 1871 destroyed his most famous public murals, and he slipped into obscurity. Unfortunately, he seems to have deserved the posthumous downgrade—his sultry harem girls, dashing chevaliers, and pouty-lipped society sitters are agreeable to look at and unchallenging to contemplate. No wonder he received so many government commissions. Through Jan. 5. ♦ **"The Prints of Vija Celmins."** Through Dec. 29. ♦ **"Richard Avedon: Portraits."** Through Jan. 5. (Open Tuesdays through Sundays, 9:30 to 5:30, and Friday and Saturday evenings until 9.)



VHS or Beta brings its dance-floor grooves to the Mercury Lounge (see Night Life).

MICHAEL CRAWFORD

MUSEUM OF MODERN ART (MOMA QNS)
33rd St. at Queens Blvd., Long Island City (708-9480)—**"Drawing Now: Eight Propositions,"** a trailblazing show curated by Laura Hoptman, sets the MOMA seal of approval on twenty-six youngish international artists working in the medium that's been the bedrock of visual art since Lascaux. Hoptman's "propositions" identify current modes of drawing, including illustration, decoration, fashion, architectural and scientific drafting, and comics. The show suggests a forge of styles, in which artists hammer out new links between craft, discipline, and worldly import. Some—John Currin, Elizabeth Peyton, Neo Rauch, Ugo Rondinone—are farther along than others, but nearly all convey the exhilaration of being onto something. For the first time in quite a while at a museum group show, exacting comparison, argument, and judgment seem to be a matter of course. Don't miss this. Through Jan. 6. ♦ **"The Changing of the Avant-Garde: Visionary Architectural Drawings from the Howard Gilman Collection."** Through Jan. 6. (Open Thursdays through Mondays, 10 to 5, and Friday evenings until 7:45.)

GUGGENHEIM MUSEUM
Fifth Ave. at 89th St. (423-3500)—In one projection in **"Going Forth by Day,"** Bill Viola's visually striking five-channel video piece commissioned by a German bank for the Guggenheim Berlin, an eclectic procession traipses through a light-dappled forest (the panoramic image evokes old-fashioned CinemaScope). In an adjacent scene, water gushes from the windows and doors of a pristine building façade. Death and resurrection figure elsewhere in the action, as Viola tackles Big Themes. Through Jan. 12. (Open Sundays through Wednesdays, 9 to 6; Fridays and Saturdays, 9 to 8.)

WHITNEY MUSEUM OF AMERICAN ART
Madison Ave. at 75th St. (570-3676)—Although Gee's Bend, Alabama, is isolated by poverty and a sharp curve in the Alabama River, the group of hamlets there has for generations fostered quiltmaking as a virtuoso performance in frugality. Sixty-nine hand-sewn quilts, dating from the thirties to the present and incorporating a wild variety of geometries, colors, and fabrics, are on view. Though the women of the African-American community—many of them members of the local Pettway clan—quilt and sing together (a documentary film showing continuously in the gallery broadcasts the sewing circles' amazing harmonies), no two quilts are alike. Each woman has a fiercely individual approach. The visual compositions are electric with abstraction of the most visceral sort, aesthetically inventive and born of necessity. Through March 2. (Open Tuesdays through Thursdays, and weekends, 11 to 6; Fridays, 1 to 9.)

WHITNEY MUSEUM AT PHILIP MORRIS
120 Park Ave., at 42nd St. (878-2550)—Haluk Akakçe is a young Turkish-born, New York-based artist who intertwines technology and nature in poetic visions of a cyberorganic Eden. At this outpost of the uptown museum, he shows a digitally animated video that infuses his own imagery with the nostalgic aura of black-and-white movies, using cinematic fadeouts to separate scenes. In one vignette, mechanical flowers—a hybrid of magnolias and light fixtures—float through the atmosphere, and the decorative imagery brings to mind spacecraft versions of Art Nouveau or Japanese screens. In another scene, vertical bars and biomorphic blips resemble vines and buds. Through Jan. 10. (Open weekdays, 11 to 6, and Thursday evenings until 7:30.)

BROOKLYN MUSEUM OF ART
Eastern Parkway (718-638-5000)—**"Exposed: The Victorian Nude,"** from Tate Britain, is a strong historical show about an era when jumpiness about sex had bizarre effects in art. Literary and classical themes provided the alibis for displaying naked females. Popular guises included Shakespearean fairies, virtuous heroines (Lady Godiva rides again, and again), Roman decadents, and the like. For male nakedness, the excuse was propaganda for robust healthiness. Lust lurked, and smut reigned. A turn toward frankness around the turn of the century—in the gloomy nudes of Walter Sickert and the

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too little known William Orpen—offers a fresh invention: actual people. Orpen's felicitously titled "The English Nude" (1900), a Rembrandtesque tour de force, presents a regular, interesting woman on a rumpled bed. Its mystery is that of a really lived life. Through Jan. 5. (Open Wednesdays through Fridays, 10 to 5; Saturdays and Sundays, 11 to 6.)

GALLERIES—UPTOWN

Unless otherwise noted, galleries are open Tuesdays through Saturdays, from around 10 or 11 to between 5 and 6.

WILLIAM KENTRIDGE
This haunting show was inspired by the 1923 novel "Confessions of Zeno," by Italo Svevo, a writer who has been called Italy's answer to Kafka. In this series, Kentridge's signature charcoal drawings—larger ones hung salon-style around the room and smaller ones displayed in a vitrine—suggest a dreamlike Mitteleuropa of wrought-iron balustrades, lonely civic monuments, and zaftig nudes. The smaller works are made on red-ruled leaves culled from a nineteenth-century business ledger, with entries in a neat clerk's hand overlaid by Kentridge's smoky, darkly comic scenes; similar red lines, added to the big drawings, take on psychological implications. Kentridge has also relied on Svevo for a new film, "Zeno Writing." The eleven-minute animated opera, based on the drawings, is cinematic chocolate: bittersweet, absolutely satisfying, and over too soon. Through Jan. 4. (Marian Goodman, 24 W. 57th St. 977-7160.)

JOSÉ DAMASCENO
This young Brazilian artist is interested in what agglomeration does to unassuming raw materials. His show includes a leggy, abstract sculpture made from metal music stands and one made from hundreds of toy gavels, as well as two wall drawings in which the words "tomorrow," "yesterday," and "today" accumulate in ramifying shapes. The most ambitious piece is a sharply telescoping wooden box with a normal-sized door at one end and a crystal ball at the other, with an interior packed with a profusion of cotton thread. Damasceno has a nice feel for texture, and a playful way of turning linear elements (thread, musical staves, time, etc.) into circuitous forms. Such work, however, relies on poetic balance and non sequiturs that make sense. These don't, quite. Through Dec. 22. (The Project, 427 W. 126th St. 662-8610.)

Short List

ANTHONY CARO
Mitchell-Inness & Nash, 1018 Madison Ave., at 78th St. 744-7400. Through Dec. 20.

PETER DOIG
Werner, 4 E. 77th St. 988-1623.
Through Jan. 18.

CY TWOMBLY
Zwirner & Wirth, 32 E. 69th St. 517-8677.
Through Jan. 4.

GALLERIES—CHELSEA

ALBERT CONTRERAS / ALEXI WORTH
Two excerpts from the press release: "wan romantic with loud tie" and "worked for twenty-five years for the sanitation department." It's not clear, immediately, which phrase describes what. The haggard hero of "Gerberman at Large," by Alexi Worth (a contributor to this section), could believably pilot a garbage truck, and the candy-box colors of Albert Contreras's abstractions might translate into gleefully obstreperous neckwear. But Worth's precisely rendered, comically disproportionate Gerberman—seen alone in an elevator with a sad-sack bunch of his namesake daisies or sticking out in pathetically hip sneakers amid a group of non-admiring females at an art opening—is a fictional character, while Contreras, after a successful art career in the sixties, really did drop out of paint-

ing to do municipal service in L.A. He's back now, with an eye-popping vengeance, and nicely paired here with Worth's down-market comic hero, a sort of Jacques Tati with a plastic wineglass. Through Dec. 21. (Maynes, 529 W. 20th St. 741-3318.)

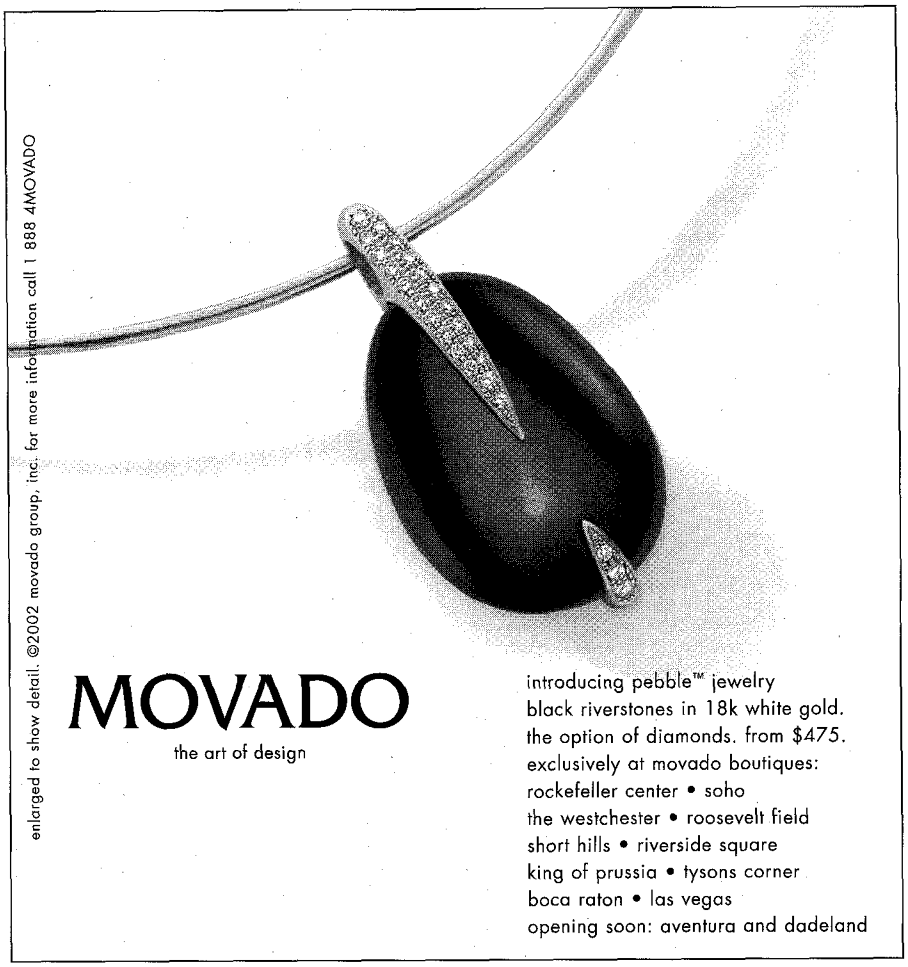
TABLES FOR TWO

LA CARAVELLE
33 W. 55th St. (586-4252)—"It isn't pretty," a young woman said to her older male companion, as she gazed at the *quenelles de brochet homardine*—two pike dumplings half-submerged in a lobster sauce the color of an endangered river. "Well, food didn't use to be pretty," her friend replied. "Once upon a time, people were pretty." He was referring to La Caravelle's heyday, back in the sixties, when regulars with names like Windsor, Paley, and Kennedy were too busy observing one another to comment on the appearance of the restaurant's signature dish. At lunch the other day, only a few elegant fossils of that better-turned-out period graced the beige banquettes in the entranceway. Instead, midtown professionals without ties or casually dressed couples in their early thirties sat on the main floor in mostly cowed silence, amidst the Dufy-like murals of Parisian parks and the imperturbable flow of waiters removing silver lids and deboning fish.

But despite those *quenelles* (as ethereal yet shockingly rich as ever) and a few other old-timers such as Dover sole with mustard sauce, La Caravelle's menu has moved with the times. A little more than a year ago, the proprietors, André and Rita Jammet, hired Troy Dupuy, an executive chef schooled in the *cuisine sans frontières* philosophy of Jean-Georges Vongerichten and Gray Kunz, and he has given the classic French menu a virtually flawless facelift. An appetizer of marinated tuna and gravlax gets a tangy crunch from a mango vinaigrette and a layer of seaweed. Another opener has to be the most sophisticated baby dish in town: a cup made of taro root containing tiny vegetables and covered with crisp phyllo. Among the entrées, lily bulbs lend a certain exoticism to sautéed quail breasts, and Jerusalem artichokes and pomegranates turn out to be ideal companions for a saddle of venison. In the makeover, the grande dame has even acquired a sense of humor. After a patron commented nostalgically on the display of venerable Fifth Avenue shopping bags at the coat-check booth, one of two women behind the counter wisecracked, "We're just a couple of old bags ourselves." (Open weekdays for lunch and dinner and Saturdays for dinner. Prix fixe only, lunch $38 and dinner $72-$137.)
—*Charles Michener*

INKA ESSENHIGH
Gone is the old, high-gloss Essenhigh lustre. The artist's much discussed change in medium (from enamel to oil) has made her new paintings less shiny and less hermetic. Set against threadbare backgrounds, the newly legible subjects occasionally verge on one-liners: a female pasha lounges, served by hunks; a fat girl boogies alone in her room; a drowning couple enjoys a seaweedy smooch. Essenhigh's misses are now more obvious, but so are her hits, above all, "Green Wave," a stunning beachscape of dark, rearing, unsurfable breakers. Through Dec. 20. (303 Gallery, 525 W. 22nd St. 255-1121.)

THOMAS HIRSCHHORN
This Swiss artist, today's best-loved installationist and an eternal student, has built a warren of fluorescent-lit cardboard caves lined with packing tape and stocked with books of philosophy and politics, videos of cave drawings, posters of rock (get it?) stars, and a populace of mannequins and cutout figures wrapped in aluminum foil. The spaces are



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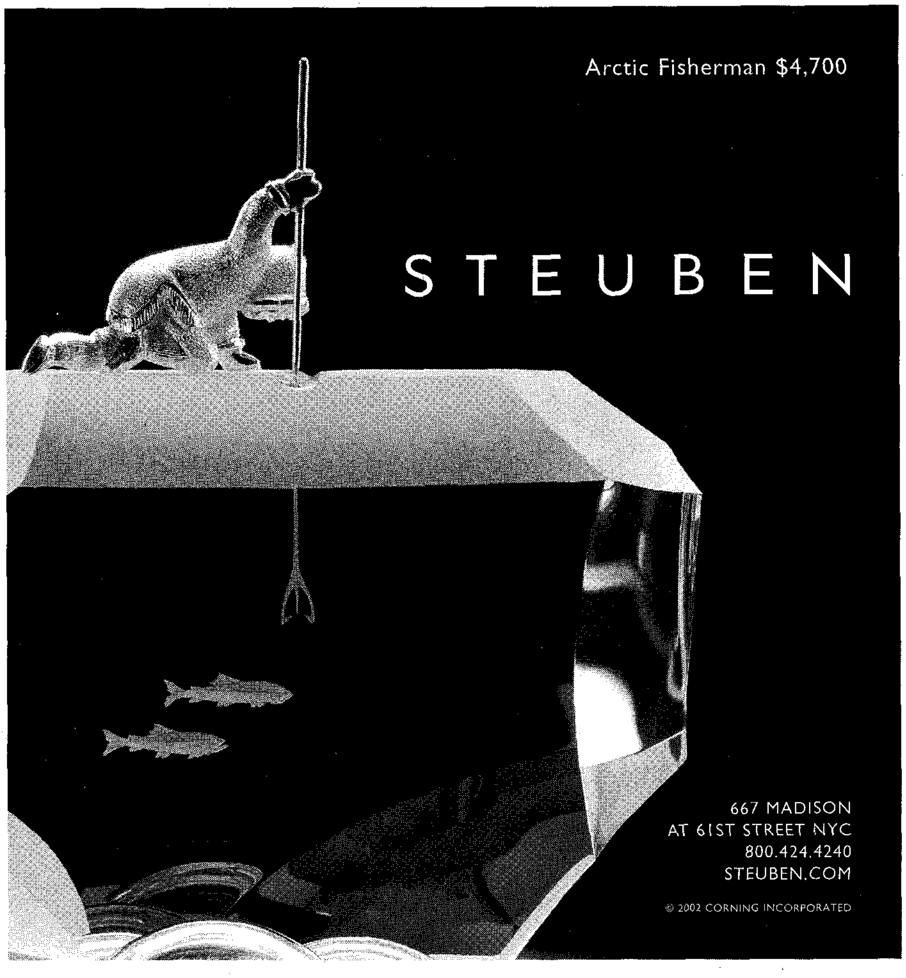

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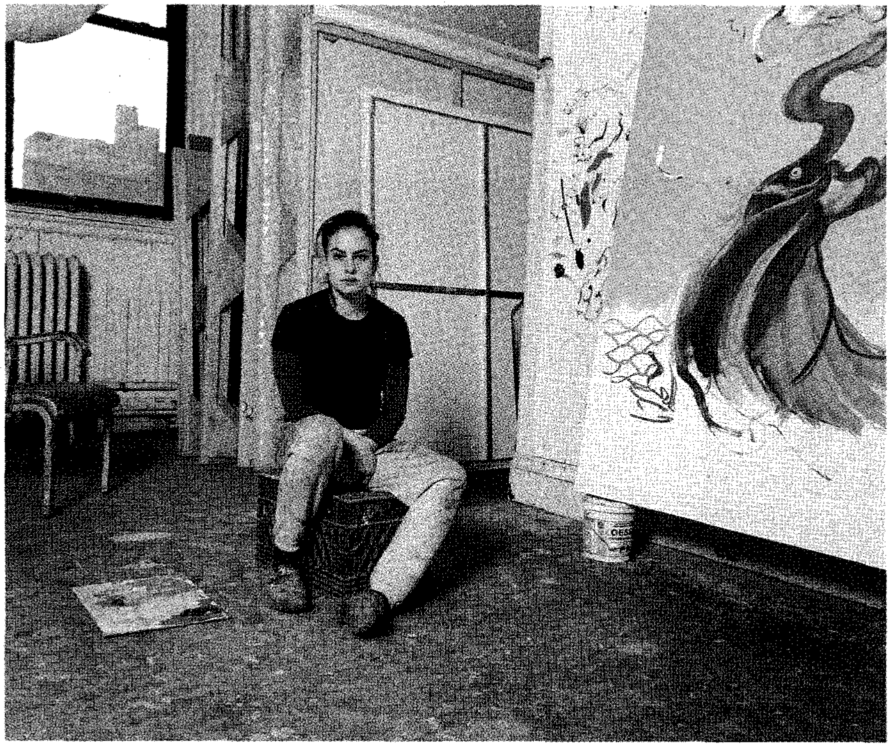
pleasantly ugly, and the mood is grave. "Cavemanman" is a place in which to gestate world-saving ideas or go squirrelly trying. Through Dec. 21. (Gladstone, 515 W. 24th St. 206-9300.)

ERWIN REDL

At the past Whitney Biennial, a curtain of red L.E.D. lights veiled the museum's façade, as if a public-service announcement had given up its day job for more flamboyant pursuits. The new life for L.E.D.s came courtesy of Erwin Redl, whose current show includes two more illuminated installations: a bank of red lights filling an awkward architectural niche, to mediocre effect, and a room of green lights that quite sensationally turn the darkened interior into a 3-D grid of firefly-like nodes. Redl's works on paper are equally attractive, translating the glow and spangle of his light displays into delicate weavings in copper wire and starbursts of silver solder splashed on large white sheets. Through Jan. 7. (Riva, 529 W. 20th St. 242-3434.)

"LAP DISSOLVE"

You may be surprised to find the sleek frosted glass of the gallery door clumsily repaired with thick red tape. Don't be. The uglification of the genteel entry is an installation joke played by Jason Dodge. Other jokes of shifty illusion in the show include Simon Starling's digital photographs of a French Fiat crossed with its poor cousin the Polski Fiat, Liam Gillick's modular panels in colored Plexiglas, and Nathan Carter's cheerfully hectic assemblages (the title of one, "Kowloon, Rockets, and Helicopters," should give you some idea). Through Jan. 11. (Casey Kaplan, 416 W. 14th St. 645-7335.)



Inka Essenhigh, whose work is now on view at 303, in her Lower East Side studio.

LISA KERESZI

Short List

KARIN DAVIE

Mary Boone, 541 W. 24th St. 752-2929.
Through Dec. 21.

ANSELM KIEFER

Gagosian, 555 W. 24th St. 741-1111.
Through Dec. 14.

RICHARD LONG / ROXY PAINE / MAGNUS WALLIN

James Cohan, 533 W. 26th St. 755-7171.
Through Dec. 21.

TOM SACHS

Bohen Foundation, 415 W. 13th St. 414-4575.
Through spring.

GALLERIES—DOWNTOWN

DAVID HAMMONS

"Concerto in Black and Blue" is the best show of nothing that you will ever be a part of. What's to be seen is only a cone of soft blue light from the teensy, high-tech flashlight that you're given before entering the pitch-dark, vast, perfectly empty rooms of the Ace gallery. There's no sound but your footsteps. If others are present, you perceive their footsteps and their firefly points of blue light. Is the artist mocking you? Of course he is. He is David Hammons, the imperturbable. Through Feb. 1. (275 Hudson St. 255-5599.)

LISA RUYTER

Pictures of hipsters partying the night away are nothing new, but Ruyter stakes out fresh territory in eye-popping paintings based on her own snapshots. She exploits the distortions of flash in her imagery so that Martini glasses psychedelically dapple, and faces blush acid yellow (and you thought red eyes were bad news). Ruyter typically limits herself to less than ten colors per canvas, but her palette is so intense and unexpected that the range feels limitless. Through Jan. 4. (Koenig, 249 Centre St. 334-9255.)

Short List

CÉSAR PATERNOSTO AND CECILIA VICUÑA

The Drawing Center, 35 Wooster St. 219-2166.
Through Dec. 20.

PHOTOGRAPHY

SARAH CHARLESWORTH

In this series, called "Neverland," Charlesworth photographs objects freighted with a literate but banal psychological significance—a pipe, a candle, a stack of teetering teacups—and presents them as distinct floating symbols. They could figure in a dream that you might talk about with your analyst: "So then, Doctor, I saw the dark ship float by the Devil's face. What does it *mean*?" Shot against like-colored backgrounds, the desks, fruit, and globes emerge from the picture frame subtly, and coolly ask if dreams can be photographed. Through Dec. 21. (Gorney Bravin & Lee, 534 W. 26th St. 352-8372.)

NICK HOOKER

The mythology that leaps from these images is purely personal, thus basically obscure to the viewer, but that doesn't detract from this exuberant melding of Yves Tanguy's surrealistic landscapes and Japanese *anime*. Only after an intensive study of Hooker's first New York show does it become clear that a photographic image of the Berlin Wall is embedded in these digitally manipulated, Spirograph-on-a-grid panoramas. The results are loopily beautiful and hearken back to the waterfalls and ruins of Frederick Church's epics while looking toward a future at the edge of Hooker's own reality. Through Jan. 11. (Briggs Robinson, 527 W. 29th St. 560-9075.)

MICHAEL MEADS

Somewhere between Birmingham and Anniston, Alabama, there's a place called Eastaboga, and, as represented in Meads's photographs, it is a town where teen-agers don't go to school much and where women and black people don't exist at all. In spite of this sense of irreality, both Thomas Eakins and Larry Clark might be comfortable in Eastaboga. Do people really want to pose in front of a Confederate flag? Here there might not be much else for them to do. Some boys brandish guns, and others show off their nude bodies for Meads's camera; some boys might be lovers, and others show off scars from fighting with each other. The implicit violence and male braggadocio shown in these color-saturated prints might be off-putting, but the style with which Mead portrays small-town culture is startlingly contemporary and intimate. Through Dec. 28. (Nikolai, 505 W. 22nd St. 414-8511.)

TOM WOOD

In the early nineteen-eighties, Wood, with an ethnographer's eye, snapped the denizens of the Chelsea Reach, the first discothèque in Northern England, as they primped, fought with the doorman, drank, danced, and made out in a bleary-eyed reverie. The fashions alone (satin jumpsuit anyone?) are cringe-worthy, but the emotional depth Wood was able to capture in each frame is a marvel. The work mixes the aesthetic of Nan Goldin (with cleaner hair) and the studious monomania of the Bechers. Note the three couples on the dance floor (one laughing, another chastely kissing, and the third all hands and tongues), a group anxiously waiting for the rest room, or the woman pinking her lips under flashing red lights, and remember that it was fun at the time. Through Dec. 21. (Erben, 516 W. 20th St. 645-8701.)

INTERNATIONAL CENTER OF PHOTOGRAPHY

1133 Sixth Ave., at 43rd St. 857-0000—"**Weegee's Trick Photography.**" Arthur Fellig gained notoriety and a cool nickname—think Ouija board—in the nineteen-thirties for his uncanny ability to beat everyone to the scenes of grisly murders or deadly car accidents. This work defines the idea of a rough-around-the-edges New York City now long gone. For the last twenty years of his life, though, Weegee abandoned crime-scene photography in order to noodle around in his darkroom making "distortions," "caricatures," or, as he liked to call it, "art." The nearly two hundred vintage prints—clowns jumping from the frame, Marilyn Monroe stretched like Silly Putty, a creepy mirrored image of lacquered fingernails—show a true subversive wit mixed with an astounding sense of what it takes to entertain. Opens Dec. 13. (Open Tuesdays through Thursdays, 10-5; Fridays, 10-8; Saturdays and Sundays, 10-6.)

Short List

DAVID KATZENSTEIN

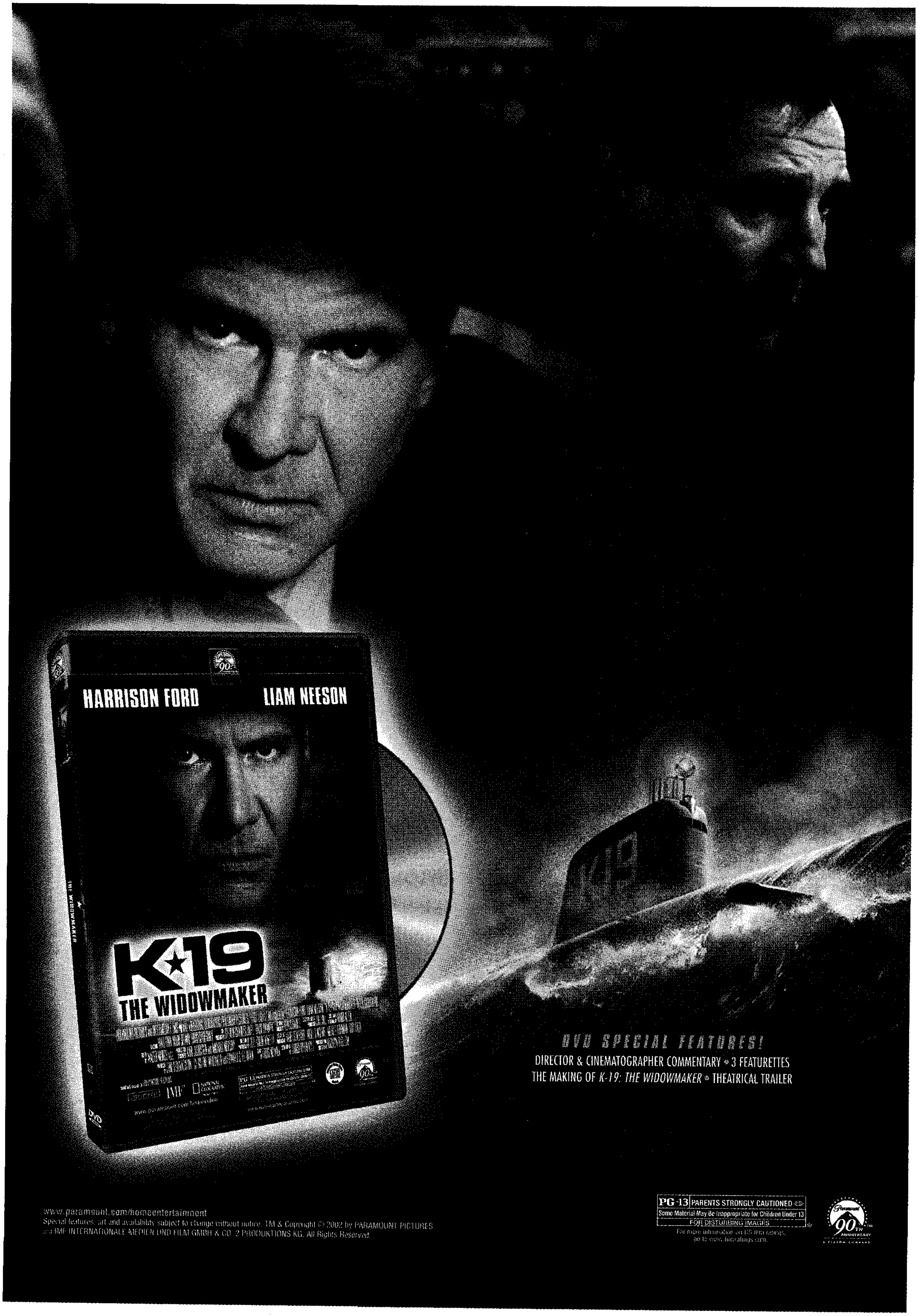
In Camera, 511 W. 25th St. 647-7667.
Through Dec. 18.

GABRIEL OROZCO

Marian Goodman, 24 W. 57th St. 977-7160.
Through Jan. 4.

"CZECH DOCUMENTARY PHOTOGRAPHY"

Leica, 670 Broadway. 777-3051.
Through Dec. 14.



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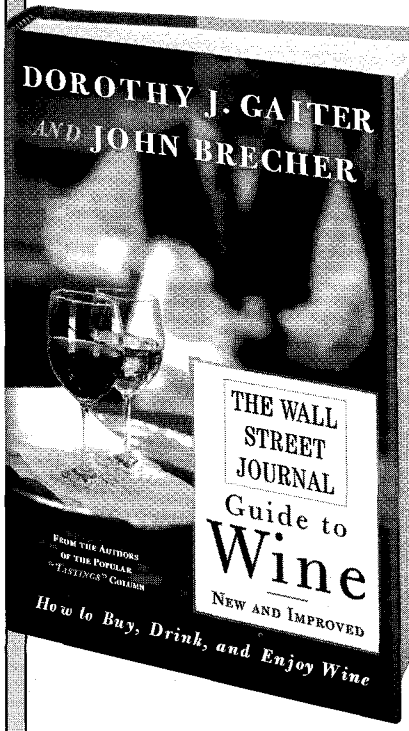
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AUCTIONS AND ANTIQUES

SOTHEBY'S
Dec. 11 at 10:15 A.M. and 2: Antiquities. ♦ Dec. 12 at 10:15 A.M. and 2: An auction of "arcade" jewelry, items at moderate prices. ♦ Dec. 13 at 10:15 A.M.: A selection of books and manuscripts, including a 1467 copy of the second part of Part II of St. Thomas Aquinas's "Summa Theologiae" and a number of early copies of the Declaration of Independence. ♦ Dec. 14 at 10 A.M.: Fine wine. ♦ Dec. 14 at 10:15 A.M. and 2: "Selections from the Vault," more than three hundred pieces of Hollywood memorabilia from the collection of the Planet Hollywood restaurant chain. Among the highlights of the sale are the peach satin nightgown worn by Rita Hayworth in her renowned 1941 pinup photo, Rudolph Valentino's rhinestone-encrusted toreador outfit from the 1922 film "Blood and Sand" (estimated to sell for up to twenty thousand dollars), and the chimpanzee costume worn by Roddy McDowell in "Planet of the Apes." (York Ave. at 72nd St. 606-7000.)

CHRISTIE'S
Dec. 11 at 10 A.M. and 2 and Dec. 12 at 10 A.M.: A sale of fine wine. ♦ Dec. 12 at 10 A.M. and 2: Antiquities, including a broad selection of Greek vases and numerous lots of Etruscan pottery, bronzes, and terra-cotta sculptures. ♦ Dec. 13 at 10 A.M.: An auction of ancient jewelry. A Sarmatian gold-and-glass necklace from the beginning of the Common Era, expected to bring up to thirty thousand dollars, is a highlight of the sale. (20 Rockefeller Plaza, at 49th St. 636-2000.)

PHILLIPS
Dec. 11 at 2: An auction of furniture and design by twentieth-century artists and architects from America and Europe. Pride of place distinguishes the highlights of the sale, including a desk from Otto Wagner's Austrian Post Office Savings Bank in Vienna, a very early Barcelona chair, circa 1930, by Mies van der Rohe, and a high-backed chair by Charles Rennie Mackintosh, one of his designs for the Argyle Street Tea Rooms, in Glasgow (expected to bring up to half a million dollars). (3 W. 57th St. 940-1200.)

DOYLE
Dec. 11 at 10 A.M.: Jewelry, watches, and objects of virtu. (175 E. 87th St. 427-2730.)

SWANN
Dec. 12 at 10:30 A.M.: Maps and atlases, including a copy of Hartmann Schedel's "Secunda Etas Mundi," printed in Nuremberg in 1493. ♦ Dec. 12 at 2: Historical prints, natural-history prints, Judaica, and ephemera. The highlight of session is an offering of prints and photographs from the estate of John S. White, the former managing director of the New York City Opera, which includes costume designs by Robert Fletcher, John Conklin, and Rouben Ter-Arutunian, along with signed photographs of Plácido Domingo and Beverly Sills. (104 E. 25th St. 254-4710.)

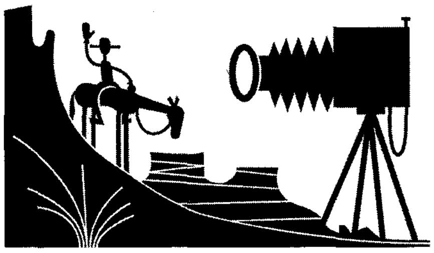
CLASSICAL MUSIC
OPERA

METROPOLITAN OPERA
"Il Trovatore," with Sondra Radvanovsky, Elena Zaremba, Franco Farina, Carlos Alvarez, and Willard White; Frédéric Chaslin conducts. (Dec. 11 at 8 and Dec. 14 at 1:30.) ♦ William Bolcom may have received great notices for his opera **"A View from the Bridge,"** but this always productive composer has added two new solos for the opera's Met run, the first performances since its première at Lyric Opera of Chicago (which commissioned it), in 1999. The libretto, based on Arthur Miller's play, is by Miller and Arnold Weinstein—Bolcom's collaborator for forty years. Frank Galati directs a cast that includes Catherine Malfitano, Gregory Turay, and Kim Josephson (all of whom are reprising their Chicago roles), along with Isabel Bayrakdarian, Richard Bernstein, and John Del Carlo; Dennis Russell Davies. (Dec. 12 at 8.) ♦ With Richard Zeller replacing Josephson, Edward Curtis replacing Bernstein, and Michael Devlin replacing Del Carlo. (Dec. 16 at 8.) ♦

BOOK CURRENTS

Go West, and Write About It

Before the first postcards arrived back East showing sunlit cactuses and mesas, railroad-company photographers and government surveyors had already begun to document the American West for commercial gain. In **PRINT THE LEGEND** (Yale), Martha A. Sandweiss writes that as early as the eighteen-sixties daguerrotypes, album plates, and glass lantern slides encouraged railroad barons and real-estate developers to plot their next moves. Desolate flatlands were paired with optimistic text, depicting "a visual story that affirmed and expanded the central fictions of nineteenth-century western history."



The rodeo circuit provides another framework for Western legend; barrel-racing cowgirls spent their time away from the arena "polishing white boots and powdering white hats," according to **RODEO QUEENS AND THE AMERICAN DREAM** (PublicAffairs). Author Joan Burbick interviews female rodeo stars, starting with the foremothers of the nineteen-thirties. "Buckle bunnies," as they were called, "were on a strict work schedule. Western heritage was serious business."

Farther west lay California, and particularly Southern California, with its stark contrasts of reality and fakery, history and amnesia. "Accept no man's statement that he knows this Country of Lost Borders well," Mary Austin warned in 1909, but more than seventy contributors take a shot in **WRITING LOS ANGELES** (Library of America), edited by David L. Ulin. One of them, Helen Hunt Jackson, described L.A. in 1883 as a city of "century-long summers"—an earlier version of Truman Capote's assessment: "Snow is on the mountains, yet flowers color the land, a summer sun juxtaposes December's winter sea." In other words, wish you were here.

—*Lauren Porcaro*

RICHARD MC GUIRE

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Henri Matisse. Self-Portrait. 1906. Oil on canvas.
Statens Museum fur Kunst, Copenhagen. Johannes Rump Collection.
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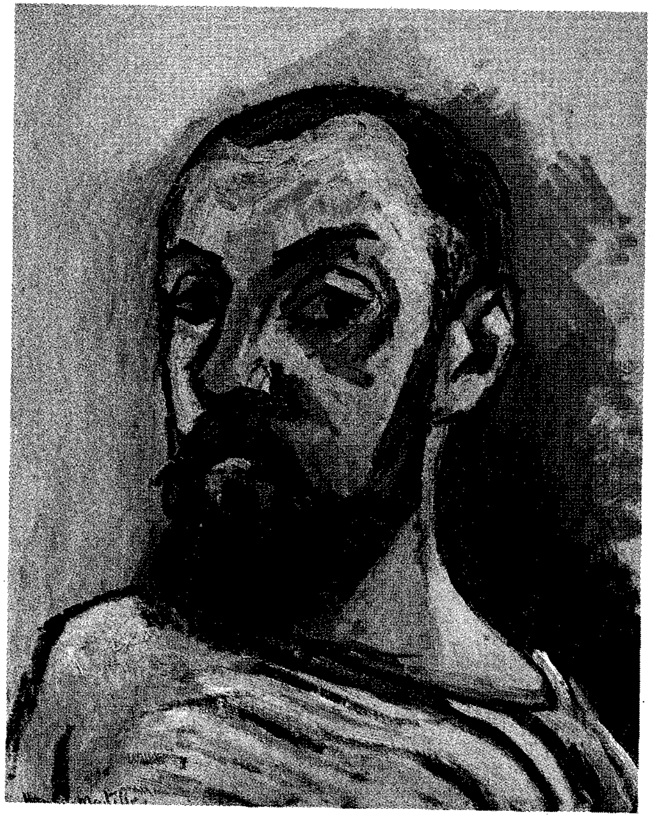

Henri Matisse. *Self-Portrait.* 1906.

Pablo Picasso. Self-Portrait with Palette. 1906. Oil on canvas.
Philadelphia Museum of Art: The A. E. Gallatin Collection.
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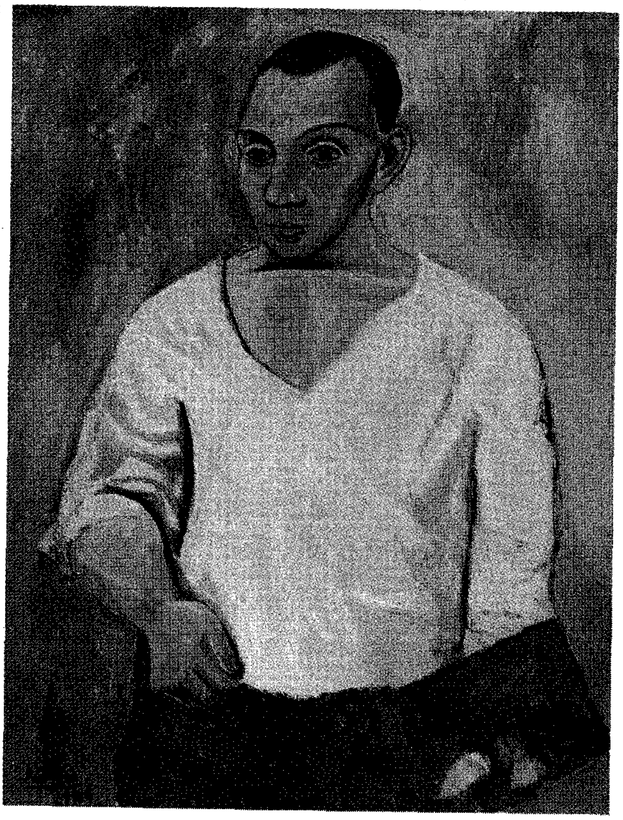

Pablo Picasso. *Self-Portrait with Palette.* 1906.

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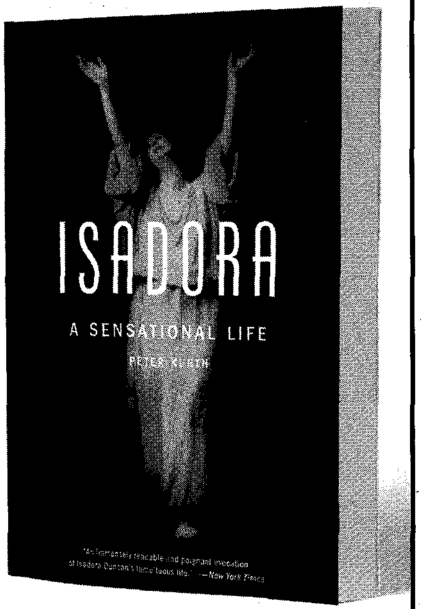

The critics hail Peter Kurth's "immensely readable and poignant evocation of Isadora Duncan's tumultuous life."
—Jennifer Dunning, *New York Times*

"Marvelously rich. . . . This is how biography should be written."
—Miranda Seymour, *The Times* (London)

"Peter Kurth has done a heroic job. . . . **He gives us the woman herself."**
—Tim Page, *Washington Post*

"Excellent. . . . The fullest and most coherent account of Isadora's life to date."
—Robert Gottlieb, *New York Times Book Review*

"Engrossing.
. . . A lightning page-turner."
—Amanda Vaill, *Chicago Tribune*

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"Dialogues des Carmélites," Francis Poulenc's tragedy about an order of nuns destined for the guillotine during the French Revolution, is one of the strangest operas of the last century—a work of unflinching seriousness that addresses the most central issues of life and faith by way of an over-the-top romantic score. John Dexter's elegant yet unsentimental production, which introduced the work to the house in 1977, returns with a cast that includes Patricia Racette, Christine Goerke, Heidi Grant Murphy, Stephanie Blythe, Felicity Palmer, Matthew Polenzani, and James Courtney; James Conlon. (Dec. 13 and Dec. 17 at 8.) ♦ "Elektra," with Gabriele Schnaut, Deborah Voigt, Hanna Schwarz, Siegfried Jerusalem, and René Pape; James Levine. (Dec. 14 at 8.) (Metropolitan Opera House. 362-6000.)

DICAPO OPERA THEATRE: PUCCINI'S "EDGAR"
The maestro tinkered for years with this opera, his second, after its unsuccessful 1889 première. Its stop-and-go plot—an elaborate, and eventually bloody, lovers' quarrel set in fourteenth-century Flanders—may be bizarre, but the music's dark and elevated tone looks forward to "Turandot." The conductor is Louis Salemno; Michael Capasso directs. (Dicapo Opera Theatre, 184 E. 76th St. 288-9438. Dec. 13-14 at 8 and Dec. 15 at 4. These are the final performances.)

MANHATTAN SCHOOL OF MUSIC OPERA THEATRE: "THE SEAGULL"
Thomas Pasatieri—who was one of America's most prolific composers of opera before moving to California in the eighties to join the legions of Hollywood orchestrators—comes out of theatrical retirement to add some new musical interludes to his 1974 opera, the most successful of his stage works, for its New York première. The libretto is by Kenward Elmslie, freely based on the Chekhov play. Mark Harrison is the director; David Gilbert conducts. (Broadway at 122nd St. 749-2802, ext. 4428. Dec. 11 and Dec. 13 at 8 and Dec. 15 at 2:30.)

HOLIDAY MUSIC

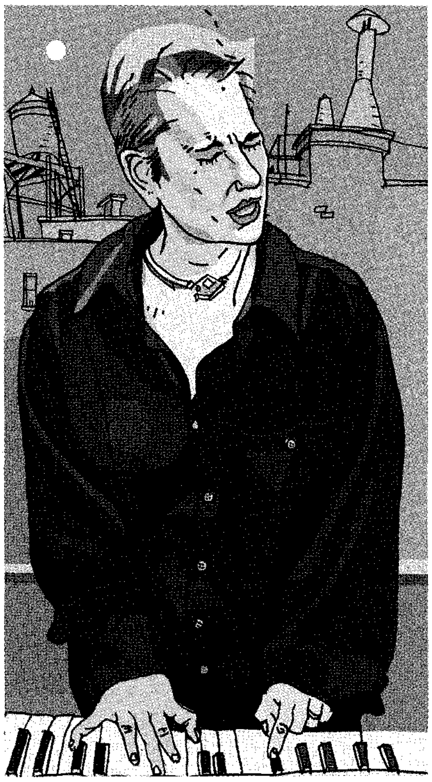
HANDEL'S "MESSIAH"
Dec. 13 at 8: Martin Josman conducts the work with his National Chorale and Orchestra, and soloists, at Avery Fisher Hall. (721-6500.) ♦ Dec. 14 at 2 and 8: The Masterwork Chorale, continuing a tradition of more than forty years, offers its annual Carnegie Hall performances, conducted by Andrew Megill. (247-7800.) ♦ Dec. 17 at 7:30: St. Thomas Church, with its celebrated choir of men and boys, offers the work in topnotch period style, with the early-music group Concert Royal and soloists. (Fifth Ave. at 53rd St. 664-9360.)

CHRISTMAS AT THE METROPOLITAN MUSEUM
Dec. 12: The renowned Tallis Scholars sing music by William Byrd (including the Mass for Four Voices) and selections from the Eton Choirbook. ♦ Dec. 15: In "A Chanticleer Christmas," the virtuoso all-male ensemble brings its ebullient expertise to carols, spirituals, and sacred works from the Renaissance to the present. ♦ Dec. 16: My Lord Chamberlain's Consort, an ensemble of singers, viols, lutes, and harps, performs "To Drive the Cold Winter Away," a concert of seasonal songs and dances by Campion, Dowland, and other composers of the English Renaissance. (Fifth Ave. at 82nd St. 570-3949. All performances take place in the Medieval Sculpture Hall at 6:30 and 8:30.)

BROOKLYN BAROQUE
The little early-music ensemble (with the soprano Jessica Gould) heads uptown for a concert of sacred and secular music by Marais, Leclair, and others. (Morris-Jumel Mansion, 65 Jumel Terrace, between 160th and 162nd Sts. 923-8008. Dec. 14 at 2.)

THE WAVERLY CONSORT
The period ensemble of voices and instruments returns to the Cloisters for its annual concert, a liturgical narrative of the Christmas story featuring medieval and Renaissance music from across Europe. (Fort Tryon Park. 570-3949. Dec. 15 at 1 and 3.)

NEW YORK'S ENSEMBLE FOR EARLY MUSIC
Offering "A Baroque Christmas," a smorgasbord of French noëls, Lutheran Advent carols, Scottish folk tunes, and more. (Cathedral of St. John the Divine, Amsterdam Ave. at 112th St. 280-0330. Dec. 15 at 3.)


Eve Beglarian performs at Greenwich House Music School on Dec. 12.

OLIVIER KUGLER

VIENNA CHOIR BOYS
The legendary ensemble makes its annual trip to Carnegie Hall, singing Christmas music by Buxtehude, Mendelssohn, Schubert (one of its most renowned alumni), and Britten, along with a selection of carols, polkas, and waltzes. (247-7800. Dec. 15 at 7:30.)

CHAMBER MUSIC SOCIETY OF LINCOLN CENTER: THE BRANDENBURG CONCERTOS
Complete concerts of Bach's masterpieces—joyously melodic, intellectually rich—are a handy secular alternative to the religious music of the holidays. Joseph Silverstein, Edgar Meyer, and Ani Kavafian join a group of equally virtuosic friends for a pair of performances at Alice Tully Hall. (875-5788. Dec. 15 at 5 and Dec. 17 at 7:30.)

ORCHESTRAS AND CHORUSES

NEW YORK PHILHARMONIC
Since 1998, the young Finnish conductor Sakari Oramo has been filling the very big shoes of Simon Rattle as principal conductor of the City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra. This week, Oramo makes his Philharmonic début, as does the English cellist Steven Isserlis; they collaborate in the seldom heard original version of Tchaikovsky's "Rococo" Variations, on a program that also includes music by Nielsen (Symphony No. 4, "The Inextinguishable") and Smetana. (Avery Fisher Hall. 875-5656. Dec. 12 and Dec. 17 at 7:30, Dec. 13 at 11 A.M., and Dec. 14 at 8.)

TAN DUN'S "WATER PASSION"
For Stuttgart's 2000 Bach Academy Festival, its director, Helmut Rilling, became a church-music Diaghilev, commissioning Passions from four leading composers in honor of the genre's greatest practitioner. The Latin-American pop inflections of Golijov's "St. Mark Passion" have made it the best known, but Tan Dun takes an equally radical approach in his "Water Passion After St. Matthew," stripping the story down to a handful of crucial scenes and surrounding it with the ambience of Asian music and exotic percussion (such as the slosh-

ing sounds of water bowls which begin and end the work). Tan conducts the New York première of the piece at BAM's Next Wave Festival, which includes the violinist Cho-Liang Lin, the cellist Maya Beiser, the Dessoff Choirs, and the Talujon Percussion Group. (Harvey Theatre, 651 Fulton St., Brooklyn. 718-636-4100. Dec. 11 and Dec. 13-14 at 7:30.)

ORPHEUS CHAMBER ORCHESTRA
Dawn Upshaw joins the group for the New York première of "Three Songs for Soprano and Orchestra," by Osvaldo Golijov, on a program that also includes music by Fauré and Mozart (the Symphony No. 39). (Carnegie Hall. 247-7800. Dec. 12 at 8.)

JUILLIARD CHORAL UNION
A holiday concert of Vivaldi (the Gloria) and Handel (the Coronation Anthems), conducted by Judith Clurman. (Alice Tully Hall. For free tickets, which are required, call 769-7406. Dec. 13 at 8.)

RECITALS

CHAMBER MUSIC AT JUILLIARD
Juilliard students perform a program of Beethoven (the Octet for Winds), Platt, and Chausson (the Concerto for Violin, Piano, and String Quartet, with Yi-Jia Susanne Hou as the violin soloist and Ilya Gringolts leading the Phaedrus Quartet). (Alice Tully Hall. For free tickets, which are required, call 769-7406. Dec. 11 at 8.)

NORTH RIVER MUSIC: EVE BEGLARIAN
Trained at Columbia but a radical at heart, Eve Beglarian is one of the few composers who have effectively brought a joyful pop sensibility to an ironic and complex style of composition and performance art. For "A Book of Days," her work-in-progress partly inspired by medieval books of hours, she has assembled fragments of text, visuals, and music into meditative songs for each day of the year; she performs a selection of them at Renee Weiler Concert Hall, helped out by a number of guest artists and an assemblage of electronic gear. (Greenwich House Music School, 46 Barrow St. 242-4770. Dec. 12 at 8.)

CHRISTOPHER O'RILEY PLAYS RADIOHEAD
The American pianist, a diehard fan of the inventive British combo, plays his transcriptions of their songs. (Miller Theatre, Columbia University, Broadway at 116th St. 854-7799. Dec. 13 at 8.)

VIVICA GENEAUX
The enormously gifted young mezzo-soprano sings music by Haydn, Loewe, Porpora, and Viardot, along with a cache of Spanish songs. (Weill Recital Hall, Carnegie Hall. 247-7800. Dec. 13 at 8.)

ROCK HOTEL PIANOFEST
The groundbreaking new series ends its run. Dec. 11 at 8: The Armenian pianist Sergei Babayan performs Janáček, Grieg, Rachmaninoff, Beethoven, and Bach. ♦ Dec. 12 at 8: Frederic Chiu, a modern-day Godowsky, performs Liszt's transcription of Schubert's song cycle "Schwanengesang," with its poetry recited by the actor Richard Sammell. ♦ Dec. 13 at 8: In a final, blowout concert, some twenty young pianists (including Stephen Beck, Alpin Hong, and Speranza Scappucci) play newly commissioned short pieces by Martin Bresnick, Pauline Oliveros, David Lang, Orianna Webb, and twenty-eight other composers. (Society Hall, Ethical Culture Society, 2 W. 64th St. 307-4100. For further information, see the festival's Web site, www.rockhotelpianofest.com.)

EMANUEL AX
Bernstein's "Touches," a deft and mercurial work from the maestro's later years, spices up a Carnegie Hall program from the poetic pianist which centers on music by Chopin and Beethoven (the "Eroica" Variations). (247-7800. Dec. 16 at 7:30.)

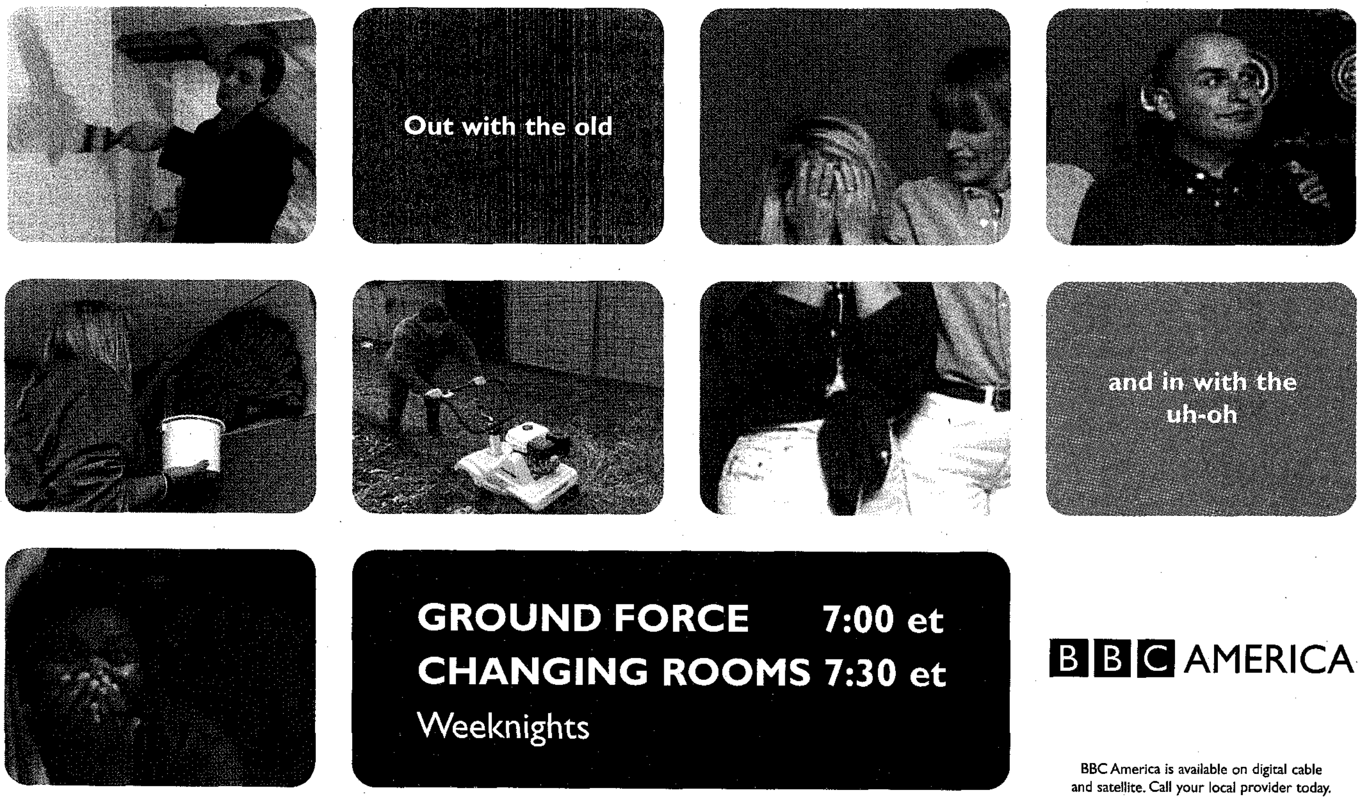
ENSEMBLE SOSPESO
Brian Ferneyhough—who probably writes the most complex music on earth—receives a tribute from the ensemble, which teams up with string players from the California Institute of the Arts to perform the Fourth String Quartet (an American première) and other works. (Weill Recital Hall, Carnegie Hall. 247-7800. Dec. 14 at 8:30.)

JAIME LAREDO AND PINCHAS ZUKERMAN
Two old friends—joined by Ida Kavafian, Sharon Robinson, and others—play music for strings by Boccherini, Tchaikovsky, and Arensky (the Quartet for Violin, Viola, and Two Cellos, loved for its slow movement, "Variations on a Theme by Tchaikovsky"). (92nd Street Y, Lexington Ave. at 92nd St. 415-5500. Dec. 17-18 at 8.)

ABOVE AND BEYOND

READINGS
Dec. 11 at 6:30: The novelist Robert Viscusi offers selections from his latest work, "39th Street." (Melville Gallery, South Street Seaport Museum, 213 Water St. No tickets necessary.) ♦ Dec. 15 at 5: The Speakeasy Poetry Series presents David Lehman, Kathy Ossip, and others. (Arlene Grocery, 95 Stanton St., between Ludlow and Orchard Sts. No tickets necessary.) ♦ Michael Rosen, the editor of the new collection "101 Damnations: The Humorists' Tour of Personal Hells," spends two nights with thirty of his contributors. On Dec. 12, starting at 7:30, the group includes Jonathan Ames, Kurt Andersen, and Tim Harrod. (Galapagos, 70 N. 6th St., Brooklyn. 718-782-5188.) Dec. 13 at 6: Laurie Rosenwald and Tony Hendra are among the readers. (Knitting Factory, 74 Leonard St., between Broadway and Church St. 219-3055.)

TALKS
Dec. 12 at 5: The composer Halim El-Dabh joins the dancers Helen McGehee and Ethel Winter to discuss Martha Graham's "Clytemnestra." (Bruno Walter Auditorium, New York Public Library for the Performing Arts, 111 Amsterdam Ave. No tickets necessary.) ♦ Dec. 12 at 7: Mark Epstein, a psychiatrist and the author of such books as "Thoughts Without a Thinker" and "Going On Being," interviews the artist Carroll Dunham, whose works are on display at the New Museum. (583 Broadway. Tickets at the door.)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MOVIES OPENING

ABOUT SCHMIDT
Reviewed this week in The Current Cinema. Opening Dec. 13.

EL BOLA
The story of a twelve-year-old boy who escapes his abusive father through a friendship with a classmate. Achero Mañas directed. In Spanish. Opening Dec. 13. (Quad Cinema.)

BOOM—THE SOUND OF EVICTION
A documentary about the effect of San Francisco's dot-com economy on real-estate development in the Mission District. Opening Dec. 13. (Anthology Film Archives.)

DRUMLINE
Charles Stone ("Paid in Full") directed this drama set in the world of college marching bands. With Nick Cannon, GQ, and Orlando Jones. Opening Dec. 13.

EVELYN
A drama set in the nineteen-fifties in which an Irishman (Pierce Brosnan) fights the Catholic Church in court to have his children returned to him. With Julianna Margulies and Stephen Rea. Directed by Bruce Beresford. Opening Dec. 13.

THE HOT CHICK
In a comedy written and directed by Tom Brady, Rob Schneider plays a popular high-school girl trapped inside the body of a thirty-something man. Opening Dec. 13.

INTACTO
Juan Carlos Fresnadillo's début feature is a thriller about people with unusually good luck. The cast includes Max Von Sydow, Monica Lopez, and Eusebio Poncela. In Spanish. Opening Dec. 13. (Quad Cinema.)

THE JIMMY SHOW
Frank Whaley directed this comedic drama, in which he plays a New Jersey grocery-store stocker who tries to make it as a standup comedian. With Ethan Hawke. Opening Dec. 13. (Cinema Village.)

MAID IN MANHATTAN
Jennifer Lopez cleans hotel rooms and Ralph Fiennes is an emerging political star, in a romantic comedy directed by Wayne Wang. With Stanley Tucci and Amy Sedaris. Opening Dec. 13.

ON SNOW'S WAVELENGTH, ZOOM OUT
A documentary about the experimental filmmaker Michael Snow, paired with "The Way Things Go," a short by the kinetic-installation artists Peter Fischli and David Weiss. Opening Dec. 12. (Anthology Film Archives.)

RUSSIAN ARK
Reviewed this week in The Current Cinema. Opening Dec. 13.

STAR TREK NEMESIS
Jean-Luc Picard and the Enterprise crew are sent to Romulus on a peace mission, in the tenth film based on the television series. Opening Dec. 13.

FILM NOTES

ADAPTATION
The hero of the new experimental comedy by the writer Charlie Kaufman and the director Spike Jonze ("Being John Malkovich") is Kaufman himself, played by Nicolas Cage. He's in a dreadful quandary, having signed on to adapt Susan Orlean's "The Orchid Thief," which grew out of a 1995 article in this magazine. "Great sprawling *New Yorker* stuff," Charlie calls the book, by which he means it's a screenwriter's nightmare—ruminative, descriptive, but lacking the clear kind of "arc" that can be shovelled into a movie. Cage's Charlie, a malcontent who wears a flannel shirt in Los Angeles, works himself into a fury of self-loathing, and, for about an hour, the movie is a funny, deft metafiction that jumps back and forth among Charlie's feverish self-doubts, his erotic fantasies, and the story he is attempting to write. We see that story: Orlean (Meryl Streep) tags along with John Laroche (Chris Cooper), a Florida man who was arrested while stealing a rare form of orchid from a state wilderness preserve. Unsocialized but erudite, a moralist, a theorist, a swamp-bred crank, Laroche fascinates the melancholy Orlean, who feels her life lacks a consuming passion. The performances are all expert, especially Cooper's, but the movie takes a disastrous leap into melodrama at the end, which can be interpreted as either a sellout to Hollywood convention or a savage self-parody of selling out. Either way, it's a mistake.—*David Denby* (Reviewed in our issue of 12/9/02.) (Empire 25, Lincoln Square, and Sunshine Cinema.)

ARARAT
A complicated, not to say confusing, movie from Atom Egoyan. His subject is the massacre of the Armenians in 1915—a matter of abiding pain and significance to those of Armenian descent, such as the director himself. He approaches the problem from different angles: there is a historical epic film, then the story of how that epic itself was cast and shot, then a delving into the lives of its performers, and so forth. There is even a long, implausible interview between a customs inspector (Christopher Plummer) and a young Armenian (David Alpay) who has just arrived in Canada; as the subplots ramify, we watch the effect of the genocide—as it is unequivocally called by its victims—on lives both close and distant. The trouble is that you can feel the history being used as much as examined; what is required, not least for American audiences, is an unerring clarity, and what they get is a stylish, near-numbing deadpan of mystification.—*Anthony Lane* (11/18/02) (Angelika Film Center, Kew Gardens Cinema, and Lincoln Square.)

EL CRIMEN DEL PADRE AMARO
When the Catholic authorities in Mexico got wind of this movie, which tells of the affair between a young priest and a sixteen-year-old virgin, they threatened to excommunicate its two young stars. Bad move. A curious and aroused public turned out in droves to see exactly how Father Amaro (Gael García Bernal) and Amelia (Ana Claudia Talancón) would go about breaking the Seventh Commandment. To be sure, there's a fair amount of steamy sacrilege, but it's not quite the last tango the trailer would lead you to expect. The director, Carlos Carrera, portrays the Catholic Church as a fallible institution, inextricably linked to all levels of Mexican society. This is shown mostly through the compromised life of an older priest, Father Benito (Sancho Gracia), who has a mistress and a cozy relationship with the local drug lord. The story's many strands require a deft touch, and the movie gets away from Carrera; the second half devolves into soap-opera plotting and scenes transparently designed for maximum shock value. In Spanish.—*Michael Agger* (Angelika Film Center, Eastside Playhouse, Empire 25, and Kew Gardens Cinema.)

DIE ANOTHER DAY
James Bond's twentieth cinematic adventure, the fourth with the redoubtable Pierce Brosnan in the lead, gets off to an unsettling start. The pre-credit sequence sees Bond captured by the North Korean military, imprisoned, and tortured. The movie gathers momentum when a revenge-seeking 007 teams up with an American agent nicknamed Jinx (Halle Berry) to clear his name. The usual irresistible Bond-film kicks are on full display, but the teaming of Brosnan and Berry never heats up—he's effortlessly in character, she's all eye candy. Berry does, however, have a classic Bond moment—a sexy lifting of her eyebrow before a backward dive off a cliff.—*Bruce Diones* (Astor Plaza, Battery Park 16, Chelsea West, 84th Street Sixplex, First & 62nd Cinemas, 42nd Street E Walk, Kips Bay Theatre, Metro Twin, Orpheum VII, 34th Street Theatre, and Union Square.)

8 MILE
In Eminem's first movie, the white rap star plays a barely disguised version of his pre-celebrity self: Jimmy Smith, Jr., a wounded young man who lives in a trailer in inner-city Detroit with his slatternly mother (Kim Basinger). During jousts at a local club, Jimmy goes up against the best black rappers and fights for the respect of the black audience. These improvised raps are his only release, a spasmodic assertion of self. Curtis Hanson, working from a script by Scott Silver, lays out the narrative and the character relationships methodically, even slowly. The movie may be a shrewdly engineered piece of proletarian pop in the tradition of "Rocky" and "Saturday Night Fever," but Eminem's vile candor gives it a convincingly gritty tone, and the great Mexican cinematographer Rodrigo Prieto ("Amores Perros") keeps the visual palette ugly and raw.—*D.D.* (11/11/02) (Battery Park 16, Chelsea Cinemas, 84th Street Sixplex, First & 62nd Cinemas, 42nd Street E Walk, Kips Bay Theatre, 34th Street Theatre, and Union Square.)

FAR FROM HEAVEN
An immaculate new movie from Todd Haynes, the purveyor of "Safe" and "Velvet Goldmine." This project teams him once again with Julianne Moore, who looks set to become the Catherine Deneuve to Haynes's Buñuel. Here she plays—or incarnates, to the last inch of her hemline—a wife and mother, living in Hartford in 1957. All is well, if brittle, until she drops by to see her husband (Dennis Quaid) in his office after hours, and finds him entwined with a man. From here on, their lives start to shred and scatter; she herself falls for the gardener (Dennis Haysbert), who is not only black but, to all appearances, perfect. With tact and care, the movie digs into all the subjects that lay concealed below the surface when Max Ophuls and Douglas Sirk were filming their own melodramas in the nineteen-fifties. As an exercise in style, it cannot be faulted, and Moore takes us by surprise, even by storm, with the wealth and fullness of her feeling; yet there remains something prim in the whole endeavor—we know better than these beleaguered people did, and the movie can hardly help congratulating us, and itself, on that knowledge.—*A.L.* (11/18/02) (Angelika Film Center, BAM Rose Cinemas, Chelsea Cinemas, East 85th Street, Kew Gardens Cinema, Lincoln Plaza Cinemas, and 72nd Street East.)

FRIDA
At the center of Julie Taymor's vibrant bio-pic is the relationship (always described as "tempestuous") between the great Mexican muralist Diego Rivera (Alfred Molina) and the talented painter Frida Kahlo (Salma Hayek). After an hour or so of this Punch-and-Judy show, with its noisy drinking, hurling of kitchen items, partings, and reconciliations, you may want to knock both lovers flat with an enormous chili pepper. Yet "Frida" is much better than it has any right to be. The movie has a rambunctious spirit and a liberated sense of color—an appreciation of the raw, strong Mexican folk tradition that gave both artists their special juice. Taymor and a gaggle of screenwriters are much too shrewd to accept the sentimental feminist view that Frida was Diego Rivera's victim. Smart, willful, and perverse, this Frida is nobody's servant, and the tiny Hayek plays her with head held high.—*D.D.* (11/11/02) (Angelika Film Center, Battery Park 16, East 86th Street Cinemas, Empire 25, Kips Bay Theatre, Lincoln Square, New York Twin, and 19th Street East 6.)

HARRY POTTER AND THE CHAMBER OF SECRETS
Two down, presumably five to go, and already the franchise is entering dangerous territory: if you aren't one of the many who know their Harry Potter chapter and verse, prepare for a nap. Like its predecessor, the movie is overlong and devoutly faithful to the book: the director Chris Columbus

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does everything but film J. K. Rowling's semicolons. Most of the original cast returns—a good thing—but so do many of the limp visual ideas. Kenneth Branagh, in a hammy role, makes for a welcome addition to the Hogwarts faculty, and it would have been fun to see him mix it up more with Alan Rickman. But all of the what-ifs matter little, as Columbus's film won't disappoint an eager audience that often calls out Harry's next move before it happens.—*M.A.* (Battery Park 16, Chelsea Cinemas, Cinema 1, 42nd Street E Walk, Kips Bay Theatre, Lincoln Square, Olympia I and II, Orpheum VII, 34th Street Theatre, and Union Square.)

Opening December 13, the Spanish thriller "Intacto."

JOSÉ LUIS MERINO

MASSOUD, THE AFGHAN

The Frenchman Christophe de Ponfilly returned to Afghanistan again and again over a seventeen-year period, even after he convinced himself that it was useless to point a camera at a war. His documentary, which has the feel of a rough-cut video journal, is filled with unsettling before-and-afters: a thriving commercial thoroughfare in Kabul becomes, years later, a ruin. But de Ponfilly's main subject is the Afghan commander Ahmed Shah Massoud, who, in 1997, at the time of the filming, was preparing an offensive against the Taliban. Understandably, de Ponfilly simplifies Massoud's role in the conflicts among the various warlords and the Taliban. He also idolizes the man, who comes off as devout, aloof, and under considerable strain. Because of their long-standing relationship, de Ponfilly is able to film the war councils, the satellite phone calls, and, in one defining moment, Massoud asleep on a rock, before yet another battle. With Massoud's assassination, in September of 2001, the film becomes an elegy to him and remains a caught-on-the-run portrait of the resilient mujahideen. In French and Pashto.—*M.A.* (Film Forum.)

OFFICE SPACE

Mike Judge, the creator of "Beavis and Butt-head" and "King of the Hill," wrote and directed this 1999 comedy, a hilarious knockdown of corporate culture. Ron Livingston stars as a software engineer who drifts through his day in a state of agitated apathy. His girlfriend makes him go to a hypnotherapist, who puts him into deep relaxation and then promptly keels over from a heart attack. In his new serene condition, Livingston is able to achieve his dream of doing next to nothing. Questioned about his habits, he admits he does only "about fifteen minutes of real, actual work" in a given week; overnight his frankness makes him, in the terminology of the personnel manager, "a straight shooter with upper management written all over him." Livingston's blanket disdain comes off as the perfect response to his clueless company's fascism of pettiness. The action devolves into a computer-driven revenge caper, but the dialogue never loses its saturnine edge; neither do the performers, including Gary Cole as an artificially low-key manager and Jennifer Aniston as a waitress whose chain restaurant dictates that she wear multiple pieces of "flair."—*Michael Sragow* (Sunshine Cinema; Dec. 13-14.)

PERSONAL VELOCITY

In a rare coup, the author Rebecca Miller adapts and directs three of her own short stories. The film, a triptych, is beautifully calibrated: the stories resonate among each other, and the cumulative impression is one of heady yet delicate intelligence. Kyra Sedgwick, Parker Posey, and Fairuza Balk reach deep into their characters' dilemmas for performances that are remarkably vivid and vulnerable (one character regains her sexual power, another discovers her maternal instinct). Miller's direction, like her prose, displays an unaffected intimacy.—*B.D.* (Angelika Film Center, BAM Rose Cinemas, and First & 62nd Cinemas.)

QUINTET

When Robert Altman enters his allegorical, poetic phase, he goes into his own fugal version of Dreamtime, which means, in practice, that he puts the audience in such a depressed state that people are fighting to stay awake even before the titles come on. Electronic sounds and a lot of white on the screen can do it—especially when the camera travels with one person trudging along in the snow, offering views of nothingness for our admiration. You get a sense of eternity fast. This 1979 picture is set in a post-apocalypse ice age in which the scattered survivors of a highly technological society live without hope. To alleviate the boredom of survival, the last men and women play a death game called Quintet, which appears to be an elaborate form of Arctic roulette. The corpses of the losers are tossed outside into the frozen waste, to be devoured by packs of Rottweilers. Paul Newman plays Essex the seal hunter, who seems to be the last potent man left; Brigitte Fossey is lovely in a too brief appearance as his fresh-faced, pregnant companion.—*Pauline Kael* (Film Forum; Dec. 16.)

SOLARIS

Jeremy Davies, who played the cowardly soldier in "Saving Private Ryan," is the only enjoyable element in Steven Soderbergh's painful exercise in higher solemnity. Davies has foxy eyes and a dark silky beard, and he speaks in brief phrases propelled by the darting, angular movements of his hands. The Kabuki style of movement is so eccentrically hip that it cracks up an audience puzzled by the goings on in a spaceship whose crew members have been haunted by replicants of dead friends and lovers—replicants formed out of the crew members' memories. The dialogue, which Soderbergh wrote himself (the material comes from a novel by Stanislaw Lem and a Russian film version from 1972, directed by Andrei Tarkovsky), largely consists of rhetorical questions and sentence fragments, and the mood of frozen bewilderment is sustained by a color scheme of varying shades of blue and by electronic music that arrives in prolonged slabs, pinning your brain to the base of your skull. With George Clooney, Natascha McElhone, and Viola Davis.—*D.D.* (12/9/02) (Battery Park 16, Chelsea Cinemas, East 86th Street Cinemas, Empire 25, First & 62nd Cinemas, Kips Bay Theatre, Olympia I and II, 62nd & Broadway, 34th Street Theatre, Union Square, and Ziegfeld.)

TALK TO HER

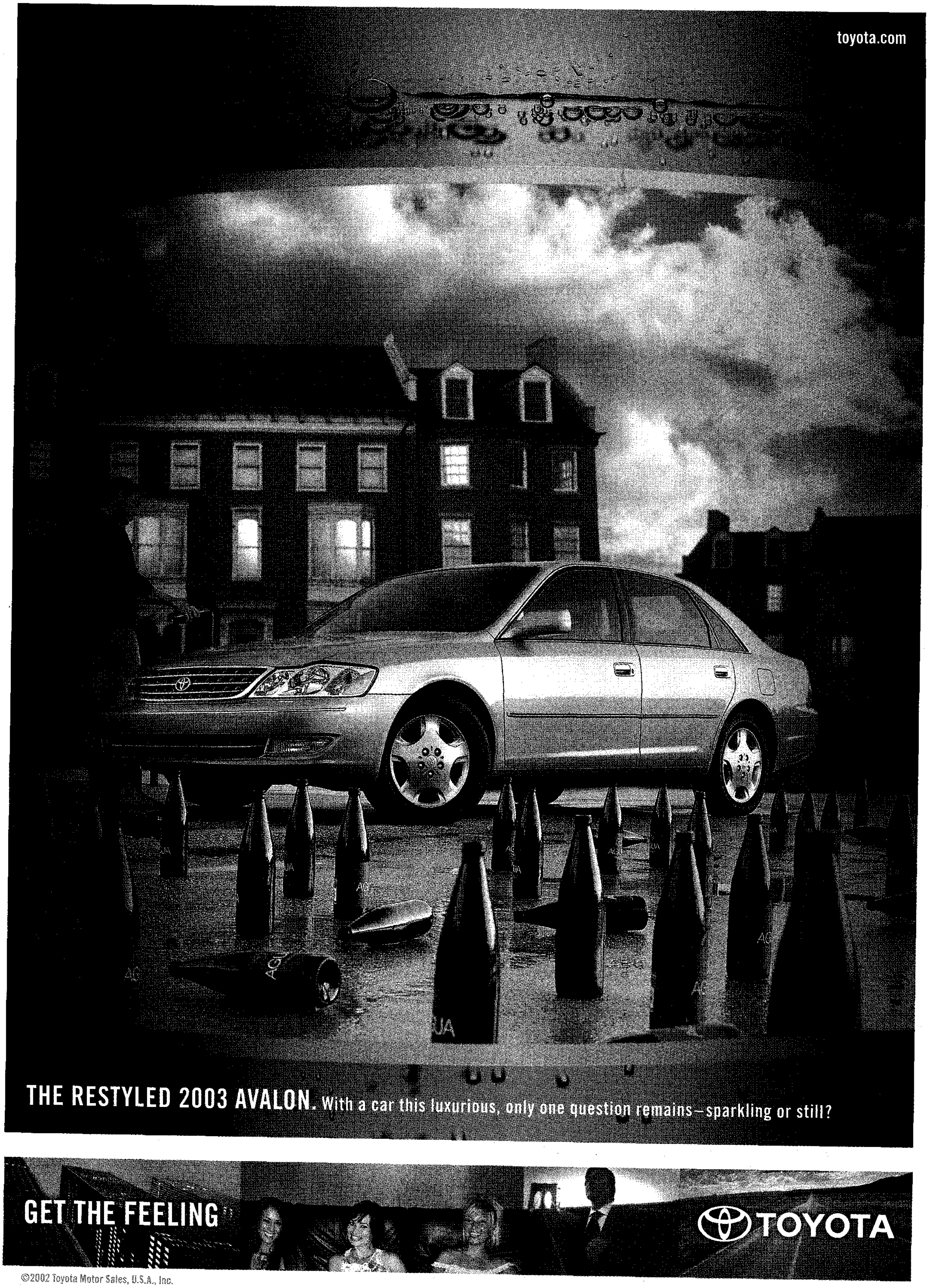
In Pedro Almodóvar's odd but touching romantic drama, two very different men are drawn together by a common task: taking care of women who have fallen into a coma. Benigno (Javier Cámara), a shy, seemingly asexual young male nurse, looks after Alicia (Leonor Watling), a beautiful ballet dancer. Marco (Darío Grandinetti), a fortyish Argentine writer, becomes the lover of a fierce, long-waisted female bullfighter (Rosario Flores). After she is gored in the ring, she never speaks again. Both love affairs are touched by fantasy. Almodóvar's point appears to be that you can't have love without fable—that every love affair is an improbable narrative wrung from non-being and loneliness. The movie is shot in a new, subdued style for the director: past and present flow together, and everything seems touched with a melancholy magic. Two ballets by the choreographer Pina Bausch are integral to the film's themes. In Spanish.—*D.D.* (11/25/02) (Chelsea Cinemas, Lincoln Plaza Cinemas, and Sunshine Cinema.)

THIEVES LIKE US

Robert Altman finds a sure, soft tone in this 1974 movie and never loses it. His account of Coca-Cola-swigging young lovers in the thirties is the most quietly poetic of his films; it's sensuous right from the first pearly-green long shot, and it seems to achieve beauty without artifice. Keith Carradine is Bowie, the boy who escapes from prison with two bank robbers, Chicamaw and T-Dub (John Schuck and Bert Remsen), and Shelley Duvall is Keechie, the girl whose drunken father runs the gas station the convicts hide in. Made in the vegetating old towns of Mississippi, the movie has the ambience of a novel, yet it was also the most freely intuitive film Altman had made up to that time. Carradine and Duvall have the easy affinity that they showed in their much smaller roles in "McCabe & Mrs. Miller"; when Keechie and Bowie fall in love it's two-sided, equal, and perfect.—*P.K.* (Film Forum; Dec. 19.)

TREASURE PLANET

Disney's latest animated feature—"Treasure Island" in space—lacks the sophistication of many of its previous epic cartoons. Although the traditional animation and computer-generated effects combine brightly, the story is a leaden rehash: once again, the search for adventure teaches the hero to value friendship and loyalty above all. Even the voice work of se-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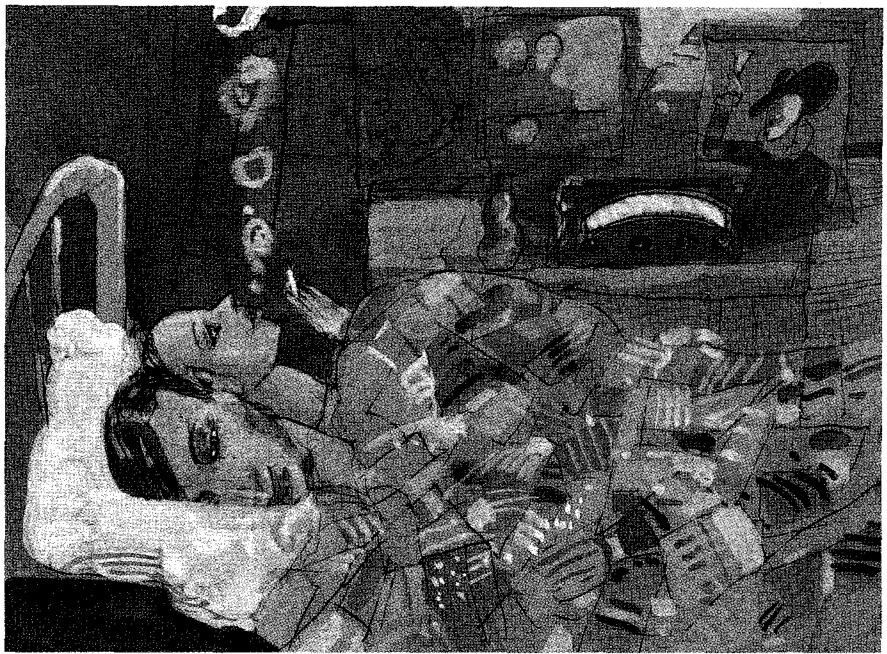
rious pros like Martin Short, Emma Thompson, and David Hyde Pierce is lacklustre. Yo-ho-hum.—*B.D.* (Battery Park 16, Cinema 3, 84th Street Sixplex, Empire 25, Kips Bay Theatre, Lincoln Square, Orpheum VII, 34th Street Theatre, and Village East Cinemas.)

ALSO PLAYING

ANALYZE THAT
Battery Park 16, East 86th Street Cinemas, Empire 25, Kips Bay Theatre, Lincoln Square, Metro Twin, 19th Street East 6, 64th and 2nd, 34th Street Theatre, and Village Theatre VII.

BLACKBOARDS
Quad Cinema.

BOWLING FOR COLUMBINE (10/28/02)
BAM Rose Cinemas, Empire 25, First & 62nd Cinemas, Lincoln Plaza Cinemas, 19th Street East 6, and Sunshine Cinema.



At Film Forum, the Altman retrospective closes with his 1974 film "Thieves Like Us."

ROBERT ANDREW PARKER

THE EMPEROR'S CLUB
Battery Park 16, Beekman, East 86th Street Cinemas, Empire 25, Kips Bay Theatre, Lincoln Square, and Village Theatre VII.

RABBIT-PROOF FENCE
Paris and Sunshine Cinema.

SPIRITED AWAY
Village East Cinemas.

STANDING IN THE SHADOWS OF MOTOWN
First & 62nd Cinemas and Village East Cinemas.

THE TRIALS OF HENRY KISSINGER (10/7/02)
Film Forum.

THEATRE ADDRESSES

Unless noted, call 777-FILM for show times.

Angelika Film Center, 18 W. Houston St.
Astor Plaza, 44th St. at Broadway.
BAM Rose Cinemas, 30 Lafayette Ave., Brooklyn.
Battery Park 16, West St. at Vesey St.
Beekman, Second Ave. at 66th St.
Chelsea Cinemas, 260 W. 23rd St.
Chelsea West, 333 W. 23rd St.
Cinemas 1, 2, and 3, Third Ave. at 60th St.
Cinema Village, 22 E. 12th St. (924-3363).
East 86th Street Cinemas, Third Ave. at 86th St.
84th Street Sixplex, Broadway at 84th St.
Empire 25, on 42nd St. near Eighth Ave. (398-3939).
59th Street East Cinema, 239 E. 59th St.
Film Forum, W. Houston St. west of Sixth Ave. (727-8110).
First & 62nd Cinemas, 400 E. 62nd St.
42nd Street E Walk, 42nd St. near Eighth Ave.
Kew Gardens Cinema, 81-05 Lefferts Blvd., Queens (718-441-9835).
Kips Bay Theatre, Second Ave. at 32nd St.
Lincoln Plaza Cinemas, Broadway at 63rd St. (757-2280).
Lincoln Square, Broadway at 68th St.
Metro Twin, Broadway at 99th St.
19th Street East 6, Broadway at 19th St.
Olympia I and II, Broadway at 107th St.
Orpheum VII, Third Ave. at 86th St.
Paris, 4 W. 58th St. (688-3800).
Park & 86th Street Cinemas, 125 E. 86th St.
Quad Cinema, 34 W. 13th St.
The Screening Room, 54 Varick St. (334-2100).
72nd Street East, Third Ave. at 71st St.
64th and 2nd, Second Ave. at 64th St.
62nd & Broadway, 62 W. 62nd St.
Sunshine Cinema, 139-143 E. Houston St.
Sutton 1 and 2, Third Ave. at 57th St.
34th Street Theatre, 312 W. 34th St.
Union Square, Broadway at 13th St.
Village East Cinemas, Second Ave. at 12th St.
Village Theatre VII, Third Ave. at 11th St.
Ziegfeld, 141 W. 54th St.

REVIVALS, CLASSICS, ETC.

Titles with a dagger are reviewed above.

AMERICAN MUSEUM OF THE MOVING IMAGE
35th Ave. at 36th St., Astoria (718-784-0077)—Through Dec. 29: A Martin Scorsese retrospective. Dec. 14 at 2: "Kundun" (1997). ♦ Dec. 14 at 4:15: "Bringing Out the Dead" (1999). ♦ Dec. 15 at 2: "Casino" (1995). ♦ Repertory nights. Dec. 14-15: "Dersu Uzala" (1975, Akira Kurosawa; in Russian).

BAM ROSE CINEMAS
30 Lafayette Ave., Brooklyn (718-777-3456)—Dec. 11 at 7:20: "Wind Across the Everglades" (1958, Nicholas Ray). ♦ Dec. 12 at 4:30, 6:50, and 9:10: "Ivan" (1932, Aleksandr Dovzhenko; in Ukrainian). ♦ Dec. 13-14 at 2, 5:15, and 8:30: "Solaris" (1972, Andrei Tarkovsky; in Russian). ♦ Dec. 15 at 2, 4:30, 6:50, and 9:10 and Dec. 16 at 4:30, 6:50, and 9:10: "The Mirror" (1974, Tarkovsky; in Russian and Spanish). ♦ Dec. 17 at 4:30, 6:50, and 9:10: "Battle for Our Soviet Ukraine" (1943, Dovzhenko; in Russian).

DIRECTORS GUILD THEATRE
110 W. 57th St. (718-784-4520)—Dec. 15 at 7: "Narc" (2002, Joe Carnahan), followed by a dialogue with the director, Ray Liotta, and Jason Patric.

FILM FORUM
W. Houston St. west of Sixth Ave. (727-8110)—Through Dec. 19: "Altman's 70s." Dec. 11-12 at 1, 5:20, and 9:40: "M*A*S*H" (1970). ♦ Dec. 11-12 at 3:10 and 7:30: "The Long Goodbye" (1973). ♦ Dec. 13-14 at 1:30, 3:30, 5:30, 7:30, and 9:30: "Brewster McCloud" (1970). ♦ Dec. 15 at 2, 4:30, 7, and 9:30: "McCabe & Mrs. Miller" (1971). ♦ Dec. 16 at 1:30 and 6:05: "Quintet" (†). ♦ Dec. 16 at 3:45 and 8:20: "A Wedding" (1978). ♦ Dec. 17-18 at 1, 5:20, and 9:40: "Buffalo Bill and the Indians" (1976). ♦ Dec. 17-18 at 3:20 and 7:40: "California Split" (1974). ♦ Dec. 19 at 2, 4:30, 7, and 9:30: "Thieves Like Us" (†).

FLORENCE GOULD HALL
55 E. 59th St. (355-6160)—Neo-noir films. Dec. 17 at 12:30, 3:30, 6:30, and 9: "Crime Scenes" (2000, Frédéric Schoendoerffer; in French).

GRAMERCY THEATRE
127 E. 23rd St. (777-4900)—Through Jan. 30: "*Positif* Champions: Fifty Years of Cinema," a celebration of the French film monthly. Dec. 12 at 2: "Fargo" (1996, Joel Coen). ♦ Dec. 12 at 4:45: "Hiroshima, Mon Amour" (1959, Alain Resnais; in French). ♦ Dec. 12 at 6:30: "Cleo from 5 to 7" (1962, Agnès Varda; in French). ♦ Dec. 12 at 8:15: "Van Gogh" (1991, Maurice Pialat; in French). ♦ Starting Dec. 13: "Documentary Fortnight," two weeks of nonfiction film. Dec. 13 at 2: "The Island of Lost Children" (2001, Florence Jaugey; in Spanish). ♦ Dec. 13 at 4: "Mothers of Life" (2002, Anastasia Lapsui and Markku Lehmuskallio; in Nenets and Russian). ♦ Dec. 13 at 6: "Corona" (2002, John Columbus) and "Homemade Sake" (2001, Satashi Ono; in Japanese). ♦ Dec. 13 at 8: "From the Other Side" (2002, Chantal Akerman; in Spanish and English). ♦ Dec. 14 at 1: "A Miner's Tale" (2001, Nic Hofmeyr) and "Wa N' Wina" (2001, Dumisani Phakathi). ♦ Dec. 14 at 3:30: "Habit" (2001, Gregg Bordowitz). ♦ Dec. 14 at 5:15: "D'Est" (1993, Akerman). ♦ Dec. 14 at 8: "Sud" (1999, Akerman). ♦ Dec. 15 at 1: "I Call Myself Persian: Iranians in America" (2001, Tanaz Eshaghian) and "Why" (2001, Rada Sesic; in Dutch, Russian, French, and English). ♦ Dec. 15 at 3: "This Is Not Living" (2001, Alia Arasoughly; in Arabic) and "A Sign from Heaven" (1999, Ariella Azoulay; in Hebrew). ♦ Dec. 15 at 5:15: "For My Children" (2001, Michael Aviad; in Hebrew). ♦ Dec. 15 at 7: "Family" (2001, Sami Martin Saif and Phie Ambo; in English and Danish). ♦ Dec. 16 at 2: "Zapata's Garden" (2002, various directors; in Tzeltal) and "Nunca Mas" (2001, Marta Rodriguez and Fernando Restrepo; in Spanish). ♦ Dec. 16 at 4:15: "Hitler's Hat" (2001, Jeff Krulik). ♦ Dec. 16 at 6: "The Inner Tour" (2001, Ra'anan Alexandrowicz; in Arabic and Hebrew). ♦ Dec. 16 at 8:30: "Losing It" (2000, Sharon Greytak; in English, Portuguese, Russian, and Italian).

SUNSHINE CINEMA
139-143 E. Houston St. (358-0573)—Midnight movies. Dec. 13-14: "Office Space" (†).

THALIA THEATRE
2537 Broadway, at 95th St. (864-5400)—Dec. 14-15 at 2:30, 5, and 7:30: "Metropolis" (1927, Fritz Lang).

WALTER READE THEATRE
Lincoln Center (875-5600)—Through Dec. 26: "Spanish Cinema Now." Dec. 11 at 1, 5:10, and 9:30: "Mutant Action" (1992, Alex de la Iglesia). ♦ Dec. 11 at 3 and 7:15 and Dec. 14 at 9:40: "Day of the Beast" (1995, de la Iglesia). ♦ Dec. 12 at 1 and Dec. 14 at 1 and 5:15: "Warriors" (2002, Daniel Calparsoro). ♦ Dec. 12 at 3 and Dec. 15 at 1:30: "Poniente" (2002, Chus Gutiérrez). ♦ Dec. 13 at 1:30 and 6:30 and Dec. 14 at 3: "Smoking Room" (2002, Julio D. Wallovits and Roger Gual). ♦ Dec. 13 at 4, Dec. 14 at 7:15, and Dec. 15 at 3:30: "The Shanghai Spell" (2002, Fernando Trueba). ♦ Dec. 13 at 9 and Dec. 15 at 6: Short-film program. ♦ Dec. 15 at 8: "Octavia" (2002, Basilio Martín Patiño). ♦ Dec. 17 at 1: "Sola Mia" (2001, Javier Balaguer). ♦ Dec. 17 at 3: "Memories of Guerilla Warfare" (2002, Javier Corcuera).

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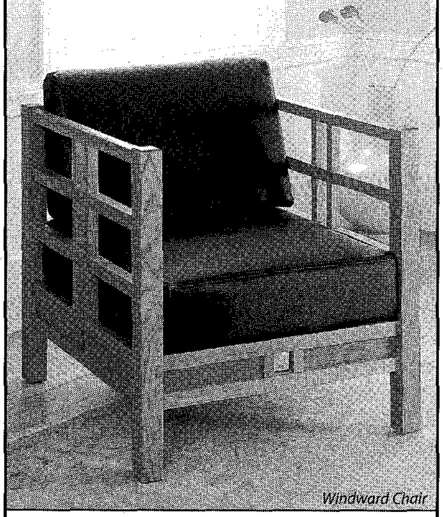

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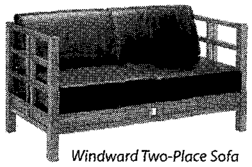

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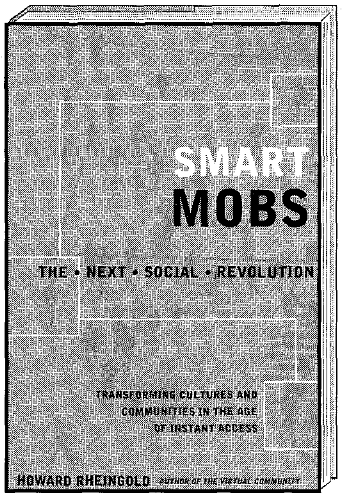
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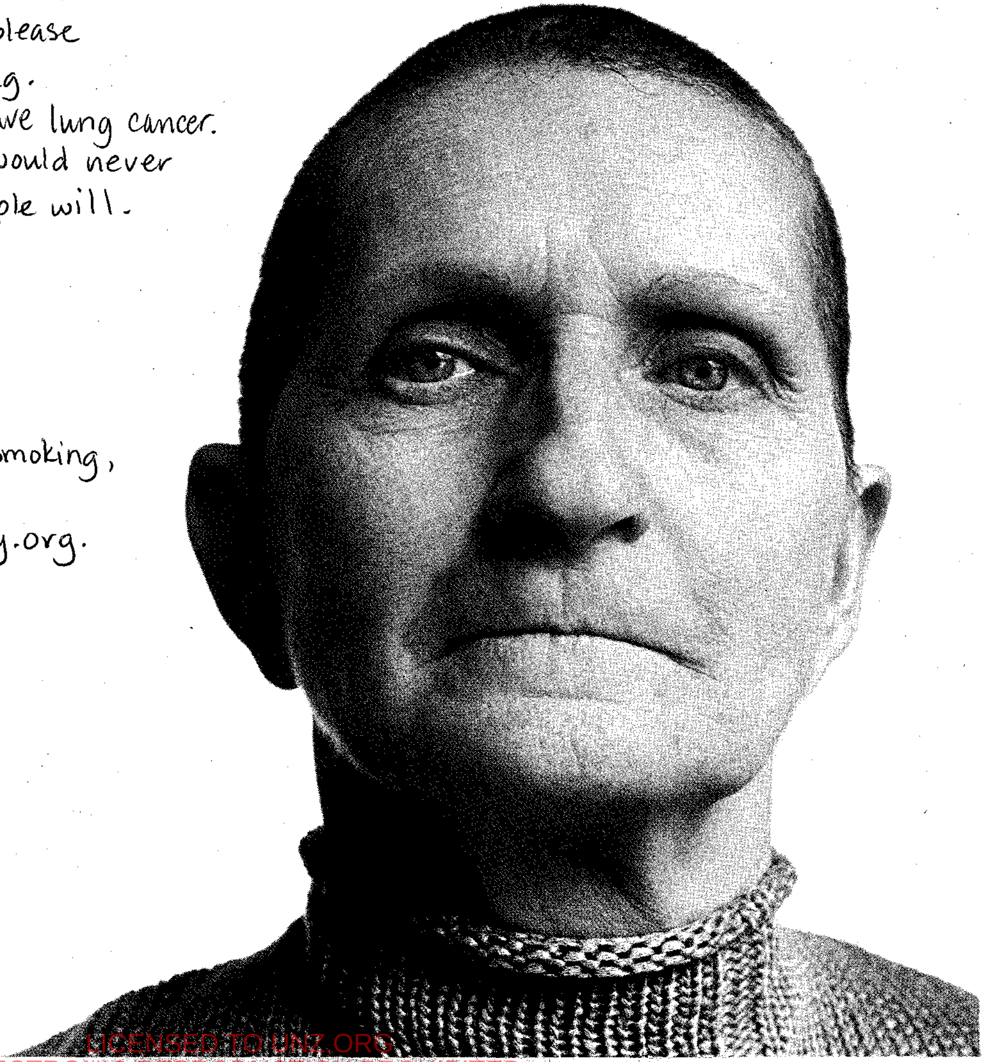
To my daughter JC,
My love for you is unconditional, and remains so to the end. My only heartbreak is that I probably will not be around to help raise my little grandchild, Ally.
Love Mom

To Pat,
I really don't know how much time I have left, but I would like to tell you what a good friend you are and have been. Thanks again my long time pal.
Love Linda

To Ally,
You're only 2½ years old now, but in the event I don't see you grow up to adulthood, please don't ever take up smoking.
I smoked for 42 years. I have lung cancer. You know your grandma would never lie to you, but other people will.
Love Grandma



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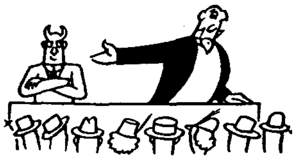
THE NEW YORKER

THE TALK OF THE TOWN

COMMENT
UNNATURAL LAW



Like whist, whilst, and self-abuse, the word sodomy has an old-fashioned ring to it. You don't even see it alluded to much anymore, except in punning tabloid headlines about the situation in Iraq. But it—or its kissin' cousin, the nearly as archaic-sounding "deviate sexual intercourse"—can be found in the criminal codes of thirteen states of the Union, where it is punishable by penalties ranging from a parking-ticket-size fine to (theoretically) ten years in prison. Even at this late date, many people are vague about just exactly what sodomy is. Montesquieu defined it as "the crime against nature," which is not especially helpful. Blackstone called it "the infamous crime against nature, committed either with man or beast," which gets us a little further, but not much. Back in the U.S.A., the statute books tend to be franker. Some states bring animals into the picture, some don't. The Texas Legislature's definition is nonzoological. According to Section 21.01 of the Texas Penal Code (readers of delicate sensibilities may at this point wish to skip down a few lines), "'Deviate sexual intercourse' means: (A) any contact between any part of the genitals of one person and the mouth or anus of another person; or (B) the penetration of the genitals or the anus of another person with an object."

What the Lone Star State does and does not view as some kinda deviated preversion became of national interest last week, when the United States Supreme Court agreed to consider Lawrence v. Texas. The Lawrence of the case is John G. Lawrence, fifty-nine years old, of Houston, who, on the evening of September 17, 1998, was in his apartment with a guest, Tyron Garner, who is thirty-five. Texas got involved when police, having been tipped off by a neighbor that a "weapons disturbance" was in progress, busted down the door. (The tip was a deliberate lie on the part of the neighbor, who was later convicted of filing a false report.) What the officers found Lawrence and Garner doing is really none of our business, any more than it was any of Texas's; suffice it to say that it was consensual, nonviolent, and noise-free. The two men were arrested, jailed overnight, and eventually fined two hundred dollars each. They appealed, a three-judge panel of a district appeals court reversed their conviction, the full nine-judge appeals court reversed the reversal, and the Texas Court of Criminal Appeals declined to do any more reversing. And so to Washington.

ILLUSTRATIONS BY TOM BACHTELL

The statute under which Lawrence and Garner were convicted, Section 21.06 of the Texas Penal Code, is officially known as the Homosexual Conduct Law. Ironically, this statute was a product of the progressive mood of the early nineteen-seventies. In most of the states that still criminalize sodomy, it doesn't matter, legally, whether a couple engaging in behavior (A), above, consists of two men, two women, or one of each. That's how it was in Texas, too, until 1974. In that bell-bottomed year, the Texas Legislature made heterosexual sodomy legal, but it couldn't quite bring itself to do the same for gays. The result is that Texas is now one of only four states (the others being Kansas, Missouri, and Oklahoma) where it is a crime for gays to please each other in ways that are perfectly legal for straights. The panel that overturned the conviction saw this as discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation. The full state court disagreed. Rather, confirming what Anatole France called "the majestic egalitarianism of the law, which forbids the rich as well as the poor to sleep under bridges," the court pointed out that in Texas homosexuality is illegal for heterosexuals and homosexuals alike. No discrimination there.

According to the *Times's* Linda Greenhouse, the Supreme Court probably wouldn't have taken the case unless a majority had already decided to "revisit" Bowers v. Hardwick (1986), which upheld the constitutionality of Georgia's sodomy law. The decision in that case—by a vote of five to four, as with so many of the Court's clunkers—was an embarrassment. Both its language and its reasoning were shockingly coarse. Writing for the majority, Justice Byron White defined "the issue"—leeringly, sarcastically, obtusely, and repeatedly—as "whether the Federal Constitution confers a fundamental right upon homosexuals to engage in sodomy," or protects "a fundamental right to engage in homosexual sodomy," or extends "a fundamental right to homosexuals to engage in acts of consensual sodomy." Any such claim, he added, "is, at best, facetious."

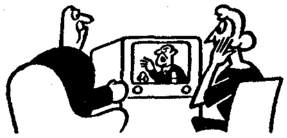
Caricaturing the well-established constitutional right to privacy in this nyah-nyah way is like dismissing the First Amendment as being all about the right to make doo-doo jokes. It was left to the author of the dissenting opinion, Justice Harry Blackmun, to point out, quoting Justice Brandeis, that the case was really "about 'the most comprehensive of rights and the right most valued by civilized men,' namely 'the right to be let alone.'"

Justice Lewis Powell, who tipped the balance in Bowers v. Hardwick, expressed regret years later that he had voted the way he did. He's gone now. John Paul Stevens, who dissented, William Rehnquist, now Chief Justice, and Sandra Day O'Connor are the only holdovers from the Court that upheld Georgia's sodomy law (which, by the way, was thrown out, a few months after Lawrence and Garner were arrested in Houston, by Georgia's supreme court, for violating Georgia's constitution).

Half the states that had sodomy laws when Bowers was decided have got rid of them, and those that still have them seldom enforce them. But when they are enforced the consequences can be more onerous than it may appear. Lawrence and Garner aren't just out four hundred bucks; they may also be banned from certain professions, from nursing to school-bus driving, and are deprived of other privileges denied to persons who have been convicted of "crimes of moral turpitude." Anyway, sodomy laws are a standing insult to, among others, millions of respectable citizens who happen to be gay. They are an absurd anachronism and an obvious violation of the right to privacy. Whatever they may have represented in Montesquieu's day, or even Byron White's, in 2002 they are nothing but an expression of bigotry. If the Supreme Court takes a truly honest look at Section 21.06 of the Texas Penal Code, it will surely agree with the view of Dickens's Mr. Bumble: this is one case where, at bottom, "the law is a ass."

—*Hendrik Hertzberg*

DEPT. OF LITIGATION
LILLIAN, MARY, AND ME



Who would guess that by uttering a few harmless words you could trigger lawsuits in the millions, a furor in the literary world, and a Broadway show?

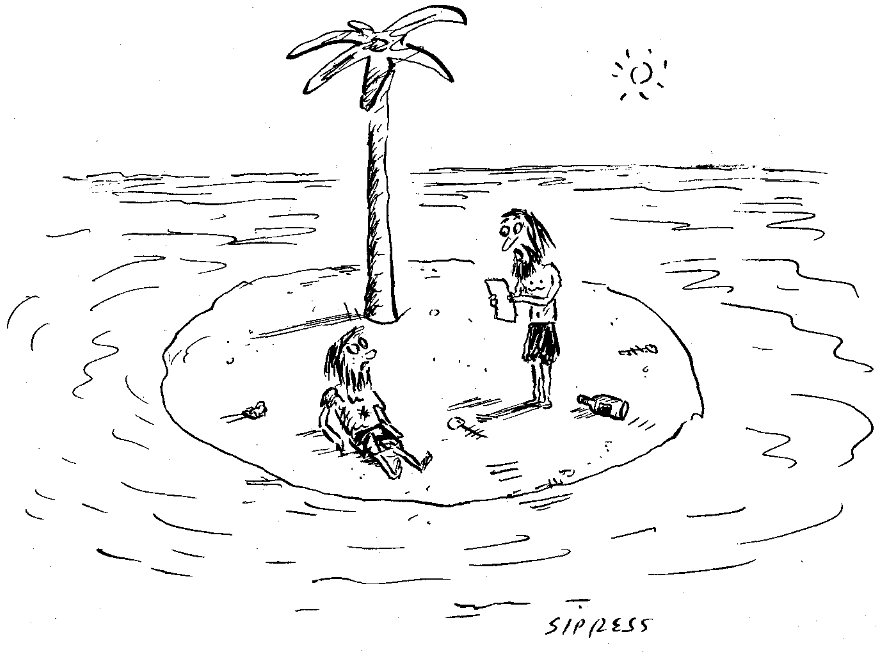
Nora Ephron's play "Imaginary Friends," about the feud between Mary McCarthy and Lillian Hellman, opens this week at the Ethel Barrymore Theatre. The play centers on an incident that occurred on my old PBS show, in 1979. I always enjoyed having McCarthy as a guest. She was lively, witty, opinionated, and striking on camera. And there was her smile, hilariously immortalized by Randall Jarrell, in "Pictures from an Institution": "Torn animals were removed at sunset from that smile."

My notes for the program that night read, "Miss McCarthy asked if you'd let her say a few words about a young writer she feels is underrated." During the interview, in an attempt to be clever, I asked McCarthy to name some *over*rated writers, thinking that she would take that as her cue. Instead, she answered the question, mentioning John Steinbeck, Pearl Buck, and, finally, Lillian Hellman, "who I think is tremendously overrated, a bad writer, and a dishonest writer, but she really belongs to the past."

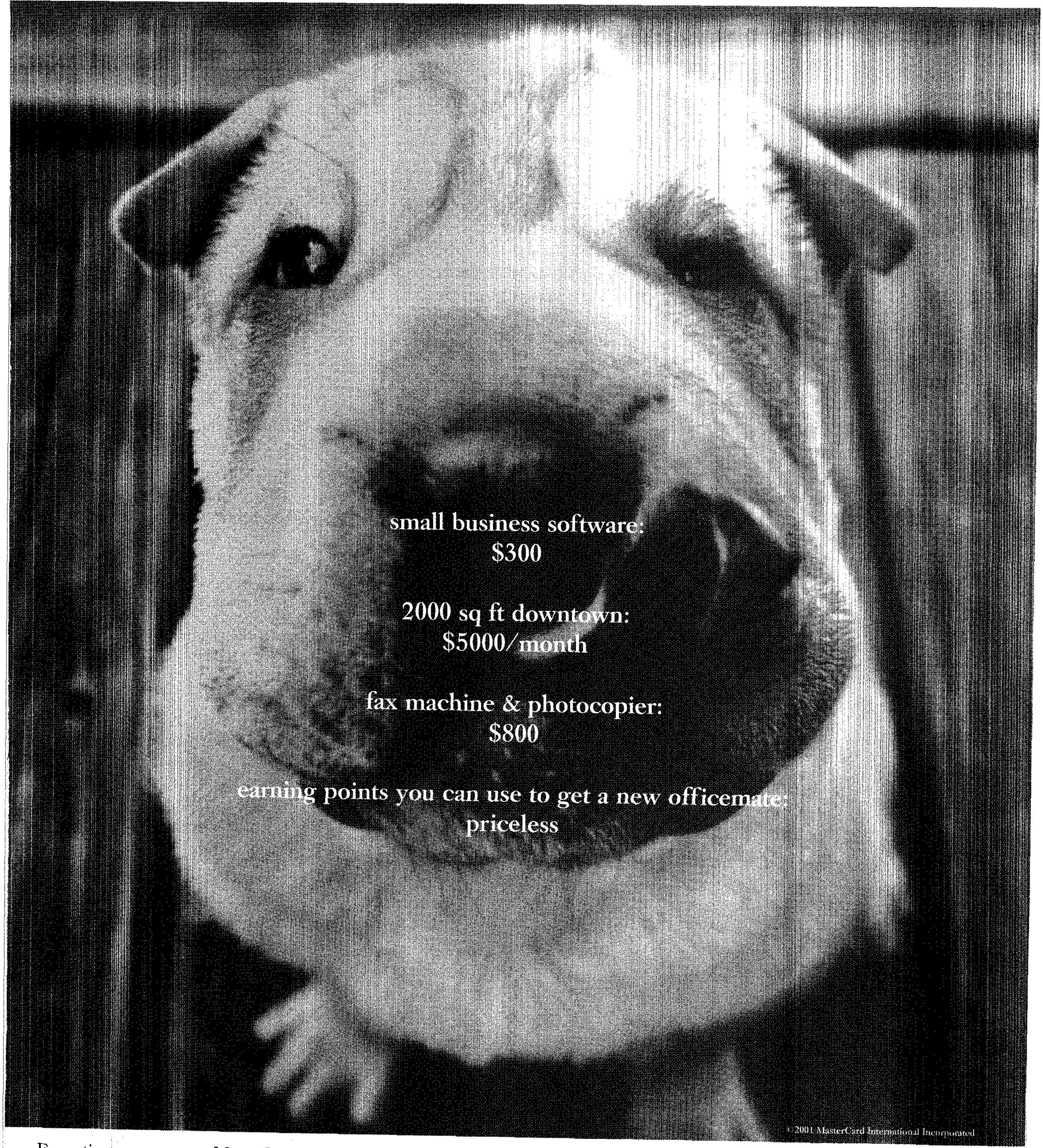
"What's dishonest about her?" I asked.

"Everything," McCarthy replied, smiling. "I said once in some interview that every word she writes is a lie, including 'and' and 'the.'" There was an "ooh" and a laugh from the audience, but otherwise the moment passed innocuously. After the taping, the network's lawyer—paid to anticipate litigation—did not utter even his occasional "Dick, we may have a problem." Instead, he said, "Nice show."

During breakfast the next morning,



"My entire family's coming for the holidays."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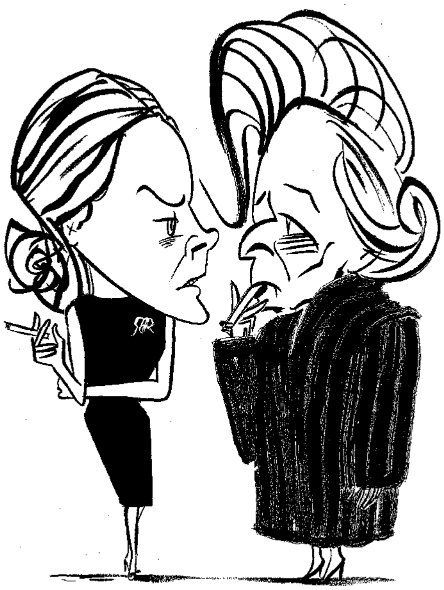
my assistant called. "Have you seen the papers?" she said. "Hellman is suing Mary McCarthy, PBS, and you for two and a quarter million."

"And me?" I replied, in a prepubescent squeak. The other phone rang, and the familiar whiskey-and-cigarettes baritone rasped, "Why the hell didn't you defend me?"



Mary McCarthy and Lillian Hellman

"I guess I never thought of you as defenseless, Lillian," I managed.

"That's bullshit. I'm suing the whole damn bunch of you." In that, at least, she proved a woman of her word.

I had been to dinner at Lillian's, and she, too, had been on my show. She was a sharp and entertaining guest—an eager appearer, arriving early, looking as if she'd just stepped out of Elizabeth Arden. No one was neutral about Lillian. She had a famous friendship with Dorothy Parker, yet to Jean Stafford she was "Old Scaly Bird."

A professional critic talking about a public figure is rarely the stuff of lawsuits. Incredibly, Hellman denied being a public figure, forgetting, perhaps, that she had recently appeared in a national advertising campaign for Blackglama furs, which used only women who were so identifiable that their names were omitted; the copy read "What becomes a legend most?"

Recalling that McCarthy had said she was quoting herself from an earlier print interview, I asked my lawyer why that didn't get her off the hook. "Simple reason," he said. "Who reads?"

I gave my lawyer a bad moment during deposition. I was asked by the other side, "Mr. Cavett, do you have any reason to think that anything Miss Hellman wrote is . . . inaccurate?"

"Yes." (*Minor gasps*)

"What?"

"Well, here's one my wife and her Southern friends enjoy. In one of her stage directions, she has her characters relaxing out on the gallery, enjoying the odor of the azaleas. The garden azalea is one of the South's few odorless flowers." (*Mild laughter*) "I'm told she makes the same mistake elsewhere with camellias." (*Minor admonishment*)

The advent of Nora Ephron's play has made me reflect upon all this anew. How guilty should I feel? The lawsuit crippled McCarthy financially and wrecked her health. Is there a term in law for something that doesn't directly cause a crime—those few little words of mine on the air—which, omitted, would have prevented it? I'm deeply sorry that I never spoke to McCarthy again. Could we have had dinner and enjoyed a grim laugh? Might she have said, "Don't blame yourself. I was hellbent on doing the Hellman thing"? Ephron, in her play, suggests that McCarthy had the whole thing planned. I don't really think she did, though. Maybe that's why I felt sorrier for her than for Old Scaly Bird. Scariest thought: Is it possible that I was set up? Used, by the two titans, to provide publicity for their fading careers? (I was, at the time, working more than they were.)

Hellman's death, in 1984, dissolved the whole murky business. The suit was thrown out. McCarthy died five years afterward, having announced that she hadn't wanted Hellman to die but, rather, to live so that she could see her lose. The fact is, everybody lost.

—*Dick Cavett*

IN-BOX DISASTER!

In October, NASA started sending out daily e-mails about global disasters, serving, in effect, as an earth-sciences version of the Fox network. These "Natural Hazards Announce" bulletins contain links to satellite photos of the world's craziest wildfires, volcanoes, storms, and "dust and smoke events," as well as when-good-fossil-fuels-go-bad curios such as "Floundering Oil Tanker Off Rio de Janeiro."

More than three thousand inquisitive souls signed up for the service, which is free, and the images—ash from Sicily's Mt. Etna pluming up like molten toffee; Russia's Kolka Glacier plunging down Mt. Kazbek; the Black Sea gone turquoise from a huge plankton bloom—drew an immediate response. They have been used by CNN, the Associated Press, and the Washington *Post*. David Herring, who initiated the bulletins in his role as chief editor of NASA's "Earth Observatory" Web site, has been inundated with enthusiastic e-mails from around the world. Michael Benning, a German artist, wrote:

> Hi Mr. Herring, Sir
> Fantastic Service, Informativ, Breathtaking Pics, Great! Thanx a lot keeping up to date, with actual happenings of the "Blue Marble."
> Grettings to you and your colleges.

Herring, a thirty-eight-year-old science writer, heads a team of five colleagues at Goddard Space Flight Center, in Greenbelt, Maryland, who hunt for vivid images amid the reams of data gathered by cameras and radiometers aboard satellites, the shuttle, and even the International Space Station. Here's how the world looks from their point of view, high in the troposphere:

- Hurricanes make superb eye candy. Large, fierce, and whirling, NASA's hurricanes look the way hurricanes are supposed to look. A particular delight was a computer-generated image of Hurricane Kenna from the side. It showed a vast and implacable Art Deco wedding cake approaching the west coast of Mexico, its ten-mile-high clouds alight with screaming-yellow cascades of rain.
- Forest fires in the United States rock. Because NASA shares some of its technologies with the U.S. Forest Service, which uses "false color" satellite images, the resulting pictures are almost trippy. Devotees are still buzzing about California's McNally and Pines fires, with their crimson burn zones and coral-blue smoke.
- Fires everywhere else stink. While NASA's ER-2—its version of the U-2 spy plane—often flies relatively low over do-

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mestic forest fires, fires elsewhere come to us via satellite. So whether it's Java or Paraguay we always get the same mottled green landscape dotted with red computer-enhanced markings of thermal anomalies. They look like measles. "You'd like to see flames dancing at the top of the canopy," Herring acknowledged. "But if you tried to film the whole world every day with that kind of super-high resolution, the data stream would be impossible to process. It would be like trying to drink from a fire hose."

- Floods and dam breaks really stink. The floodwaters carry so much sediment that you can't tell water from land, and even in false-color images the pooled water appears dark and dull and small, like coal shavings.
- Canada also stinks ("Smoke from Canadian Fires Blankets Eastern U.S."; "Canadian Smoke Off Norway").
- China is a giant smudge pot ("Smog Obscures Chinese Coast"; "Massive Dust Plume Emanates from China"; "Asian Dust Reaches Alaska"). From on high, China looks like old veal seen through cheesecloth during an eclipse. But that murkiness is precisely the point. "I'm moved by these images of haze in Asia," Herring said. "As you learn to read them, you connect the fact that you can't see much with the fact that so many people are dying there of respiratory illnesses."

The least powerful images are often the most suggestive. Herring's favorite is a topographic map of El Misti, the volcano in southern Peru, and its neighboring city of Arequipa. Though active, El Misti isn't doing anything at the moment, but Arequipa is: it has spread up the volcano's flanks along the gullies where lava and ash will someday begin to flow. "The hubris," Herring said. "The hubris."

—*Tad Friend*

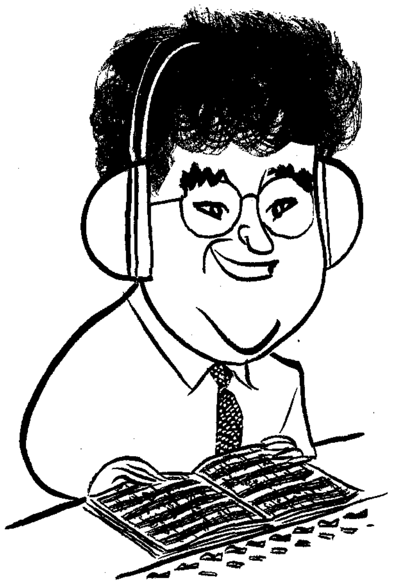
OLDIES BUT GOODIES DEPT.
PLAY IT AGAIN

Adam Abeshouse, a Grammy-winning classical-record producer and helpless hyper-enthusiast, has taken several concrete measures to address what he regards as an urgent imperative: to rescue Bach, Brahms, Beethoven, Mozart, and that crowd from a specific sort of oblivion. In October, during a concert at Carnegie Hall, Abeshouse formally launched the Classical Recording Foundation, an entity devoted to the proposition that posterity is despoiled when artists are denied the chance to record their own interpretations of certain repertoire. For a long while, it's been evident that the executives behind the major classical-recording labels (Sony, Phillips, EMI, etc.) are far more aroused by the hypothetical bottom-line appeal of, say, Dolly Parton singing the Bach "Wedding Cantata" or Bon Jovi conducting the "1812 Overture" than they are by the prospect of investing in Gilbert Kalish and Joel Krosnick's rendition of Brahms's cello sonatas, or the Kalichstein-Laredo-Robinson Trio's complete cycle of Beethoven trios, or the St. Luke Chamber Ensemble's "Brandenburg Concertos." As it happens, Abeshouse, who won his Grammy in 2000, has produced the latter three albums, all under the mom-and-pop-ish Arabesque label, and the Carnegie Hall concert honored these musicians as the Classical Recording Foundation's inaugural award winners.

What inspired Abeshouse to create the C.R.F. was this principled logic: if live performances of the New York Philharmonic and every other professional classical ensemble could not exist without huge philanthropic subsidies, why should recorded classical music be held to an entirely different fiscal standard? So he set about establishing the foundation and enlisted Susan Rose, an amateur pianist and peripatetic patron of the arts, to chair its board. In the future, if all goes according to plan—which is to say, whenever there's enough money in the kitty—the C.R.F. will produce and distribute, under its own label or in partnership with other labels, whatever it deems worthy and feasible.

Is there a need, after Alfred Brendel, for anyone else's Beethoven piano sonatas? Does the immortality of Glenn Gould's "Goldberg Variations" mean that no mortal should ever again bother? (Not that either Brendel or Gould—driven by fervors that Abeshouse has no trouble sympathizing with—hesitated to re-record these same works.) "I've had people tell me, 'I already have a copy of Beethoven's violin concertos. Why would I need another one?'" Abeshouse said the other day. "But does anyone invoke that sort of reasoning when it comes to great tennis matches or baseball games? If that axiom were applied to sporting events, the stadiums would be empty."

At that moment, Abeshouse, a roundish fellow in his early forties with curly dark-brown hair and a genial on-the-job perfectionism, was stationed in a basement recording studio on the campus of the State University of New York at Purchase. In a recital hall upstairs, the pianist Anne-Marie McDermott was two hours into a recording session, having just run through the first take of the third movement of Prokofiev's Eighth Piano Sonata. This was the continuation of an undertaking that had begun five years earlier, when Abeshouse produced her performances of Prokofiev's Piano Sonatas Nos. 5 and 6 and a piece called "Sarcasms." Those pieces were released by Arabesque in 1999, and it subsequently occurred to McDermott that she wanted to record the rest of the Prokofiev sonatas: Nos. 1-4 and 7-9.



Adam Abeshouse

"I spent a lot of time listening to other recordings that had no life," she said when she came downstairs, a few minutes later, to receive some friendly technical suggestions from Abeshouse. "It actually angered me. I thought it was abusive. It made it impossible to recognize the repertoire for the incredible body of work that it is. So Adam and I had conversations with Arabesque. For a while, it seemed like the money was

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there, and then it would turn out that the money wasn't there. And that was disappointing, because I would arrange my concert schedule around recording sessions that then wouldn't happen." Now that the Classical Recording Foundation has come into existence, Arabesque will release, with a subsidy from the foundation, McDermott's compendium of Prokofiev.

McDermott is petite and sharp-featured and has reddish-highlighted brunet curls, snappy New York-Irish diction, and a hair-trigger laugh. She and Abeshouse have known each other since they were children, studying at the Manhattan School of Music, and when they work together they regularly finish each other's sentences. Now it was time for her to re-station herself upstairs at the Steinway concert grand. In the basement, Abeshouse could hear her heels clicking as she walked across the stage. She began warming up at the keyboard, and Abeshouse said, "Anne-Marie had terrific stage presence even as a kid. My dad still talks about the exuberance of her playing during a recital when she was twelve. Well, we both played in it, but he talks about her. My goal now, you might say, is to make recordings of mature artists that have that degree of memory and impact."

—*Mark Singer*

POSTSCRIPT
ANNA HAMBURGER

Anna Hamburger was the place your gaze stopped when you'd just come into a crowded East Side living room, dropped in at a friend's Village gallery opening, arrived at a neighbor's walkup for Christmas cheer, or looked past the surrounding strangers at the theatre and discovered her, there across the narrow theatre lobby, at intermission. Good, you thought, everything's all right now. You looked again, as you moved toward her, waiting for her to spot you as you got closer, and for that breathtaking welcoming smile—her huge, heavy-lidded eyes opening wide—and for her to say your name in greeting ("Raw-juh!" in a woodwind contralto) and put up her face toward yours. Anna, who died last week, at the age of ninety, was the wife of our long-term friend and colleague Philip Hamburger, and wherever she went he came, too. She'd had a long, happy marriage (and two children) to her first husband, the writer Norman Matson, and then this second brilliant go-round. She had ten grandchildren and fourteen great-grands.

Phil and Anna were a couple in the gin-and-tonic, Héloïse-and-Abélard sense. You rarely thought of them as anything but two—he in his dark suit, with his curved little smile; she close at hand, with pale lipstick and extraordinary hair. They belonged to an aristocracy of energetic attendance and intense critical response. "Have you read . . . ? Did you hear . . . ? Wasn't that . . . ?" And if you'd read the book, by chance, or been at the concert, or happened upon this particular op-ed disaster—or even if you'd somehow missed it—you were swept aboard, listening and laughing with this avid couple at this suddenly significant moment.

Anna grew up in Greenwich in the nineteen-twenties. Her father, the Socialist labor reformer William English Walling, was a contributor to the original *Masses*, and she never lost the conviction that the good guys would triumph in the end. After voters had given Richard Nixon another term, or Fritz Mondale or Mario Cuomo had come to grief, she and Phil would be on the phone the next morning or have you over to dinner the next week. "How could they?" she exclaimed, spreading her hands wide. "It's unbe-*lee*vable!" Optimistic but never naïve, she was tough and comforting at the same time. "She knew exactly what people were like and didn't let it bother her," one friend said of Anna the other day. "She took care of you," said another. In a community of the gifted, she practiced intimacy as if it were an art form, and became another New York genius.

—*Roger Angell*

TEST YOUR ROYAL I.Q.

1. A prominent Harley Street physician was recently summoned to Buckingham Palace in the middle of the night to: (a) take over an unconscious Prince Harry's hand in Her Majesty's weekly poker game; (b) surgically remove Her Majesty's hat; (c) revive Her Majesty's corgi after an overdose.

2. You are Queen Elizabeth II reviewing the annual Trooping the Colour when you realize that your horse is drunk. You: (a) call Prince Harry for advice; (b) call Prince Edward for advice; (c) call Prince William for advice; (d) call Prince Andrew for advice.

3. At a recent ribbon-cutting in the Midlands, Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II: (a) jabbed Prince William with the scissors as he was making a pass at Miss Yorkshire Pudding; (b) called her bookie on her cell phone; (c) asked if there might be a job opening for Prince Charles.

4. The City of London just passed new bylaws allowing members of the Royal Family to drive on the sidewalks after midnight because: (a) it's safer than letting them drive on the roads; (b) the Royals are all unconscious by midnight and unable to drive anyway; (c) they will hit something sooner this way, reducing the hazard to the public.

5. Prince Harry is invited to your home for tea. After he excuses himself to use the facilities, you hear a loud crash and find his Aston Martin upside down in the kitchen and a dazed Prince Harry under the table having a smoke. You: (a) direct him to the lavatory; (b) ask about his studies; (c) point out that his hair is on fire.

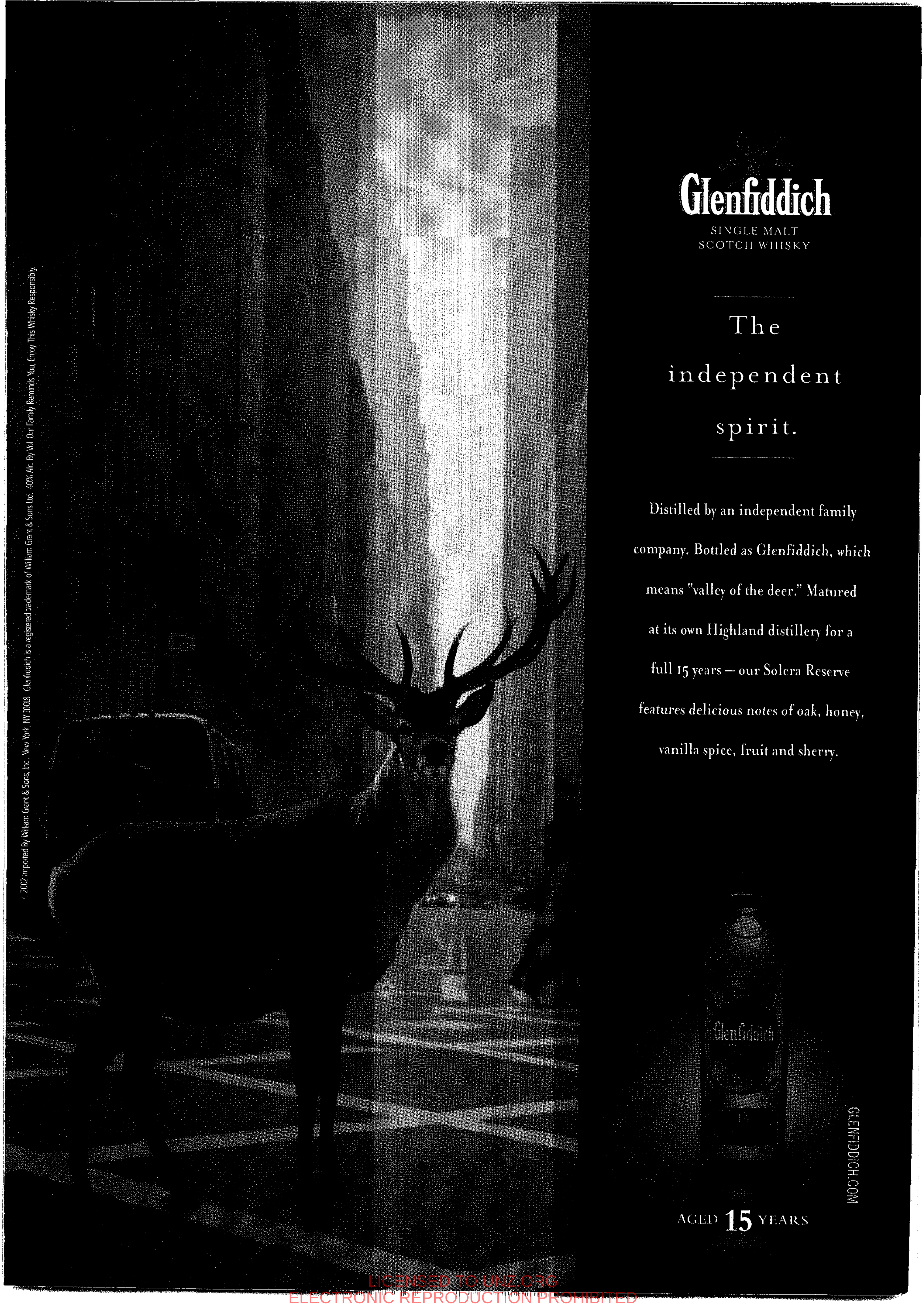
6. Royal Family Word Association Test. Circle the words or phrases that do *not* belong: libertine / chinless / no fashion sense / gin / charges pending / intelligent / sot / scapegrace / thick / playboy / dolt / sweet-natured.

7. Balmoral Castle, the Royal Family's historic Scottish retreat, is being converted into: (a) a body-and-paint shop for Royal vehicles; (b) a reëducation facility for Royal butlers, maids, and ladies-in-waiting who are caught talking to the press; (c) the Windsor Rehabilitation Clinic.

8. The very best thing about the Royal Family is:

Sorry, time's up!

—*Bruce McCall*



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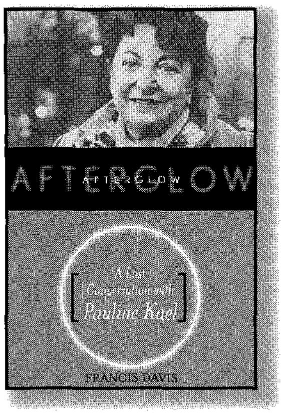

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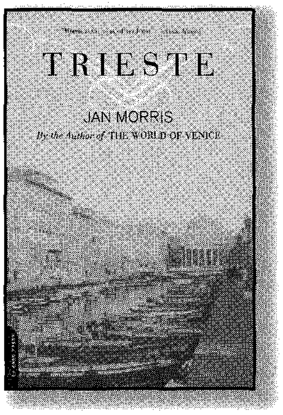
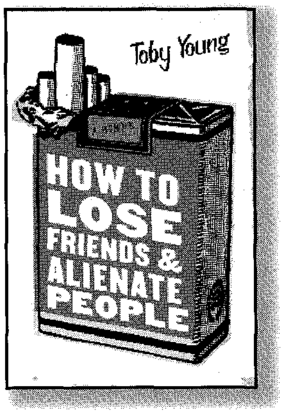


"Morris at the peak of her form."
—*Atlantic Monthly*

think *funny*



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ANNALS OF POLITICS

CANDIDE

Joe Lieberman looks hopefully toward the White House.

BY JEFFREY TOOBIN

Senator Joseph Lieberman, Democrat of Connecticut and Al Gore's Vice-Presidential running mate, is seldom happier than when he is talking about his own Presidential ambitions, even his much discussed pledge regarding Gore. Last year, Lieberman promised that he would not seek the Presidency if Gore tried again. One night in October, the issue came up at a small fund-raiser in Miami Beach where fifty Lieberman supporters in south Florida had paid a thousand dollars each to hear the Senator in an intimate setting over dinner at a private house. The weather was hot and sticky, but Lieberman, mingling with the guests on the patio, never took off his jacket and tie, and his demeanor remained serious. After a brief talk, he took questions, mostly about Iraq and the Middle East. When one guest asked about his plans for 2004, Lieberman said, "Good question!" and beamed.

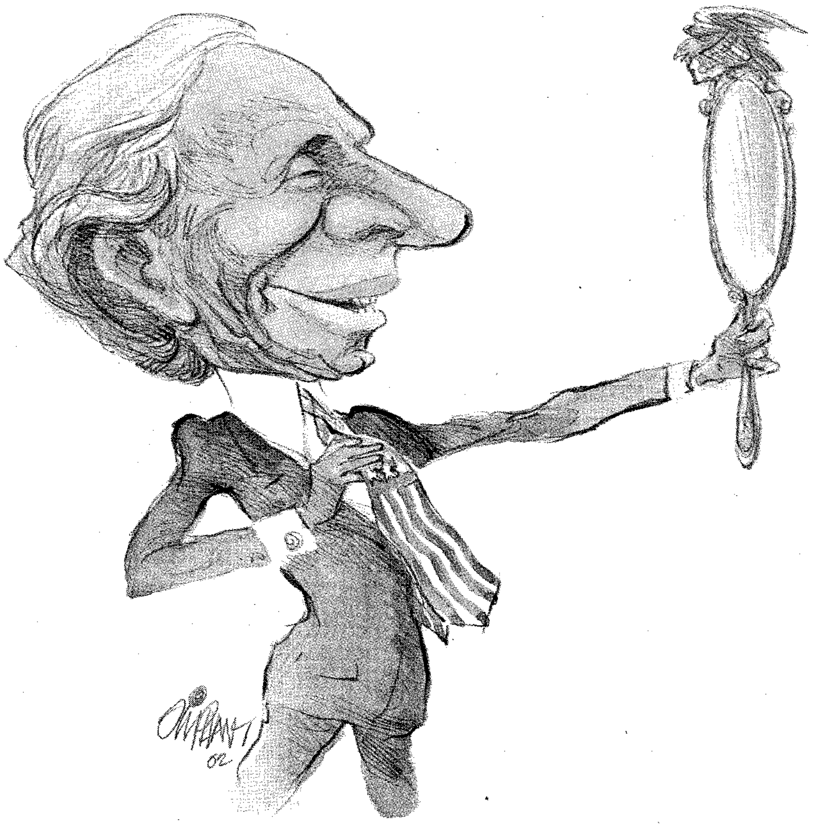
"I made a pledge last year that I wouldn't run if Al did in '04," he said. "It felt right then, and it feels right now. If there is a possibility for a Presidential candidacy by me, and I think there is, a lot of it comes back to him picking me. So I'm waiting to hear what Al decides. But here are some of the numbers that I'll share with you. There have been four big polls recently. With Gore in the race, Al always comes in first. With Gore out of the race, I have come in first in every one of the four." The audience applauded politely, urging him on. "So these numbers tell me that when I think about running for President I'm not 'inhaling.' " Much laughter.

With the joke, Lieberman was gently mocking his own reputation for sobriety, if not sanctimony. He may be a thoroughgoing moderate in his politics, but he is a true conservative in temperament and style. His world is an orderly place, where people wait in line, take their turns, and generally behave themselves. Lieberman wants badly to be the President, but decorum compels him to defer to Gore. Like Nick Carraway, Lieberman wants "the world to be in uniform and at a sort of moral attention forever." When he was just a little-known senator, picking and choosing the issues he wanted to speak out on, this sense of rectitude served him well, but now the stakes are higher and the fights are grittier, and he seems perpetually disappointed, even surprised, when other politicians don't play by his rules.

Shortly after the September 11th attacks, Lieberman introduced a bill to create a Department of Homeland Security. At first, the Bush Administration opposed the proposal, but then, in June of this year, the Republicans suddenly made creation of the new department the centerpiece of their antiterrorism initiatives, and the bill appeared headed for easy passage. As the floor manager for the Senate, Lieberman had the most high-profile assignment of his thirteen years in office.

When the Senate began debating specific legislative language, a problem arose. President Bush asked for a provision allowing him to waive certain civil-service protections for employees of the new department if he thought it was in the interest of national security. Bush sought, for example, the authority to hire and fire at will in the new department. (He would still be bound by anti-discrimination laws, including those barring favoritism based on political affiliation.) The President's proposal also allowed him, in the name of national security, to exempt certain workers from collective-bargaining agreements. He already had that kind of authority over other parts of the government, and he had used it earlier in the year to prevent a union-organizing drive at the United States attorney's office in Miami. "The unions got very agitated about this," Lieberman told me one day in September, while the issue was being debated.

Lieberman seemed bewildered that this relatively obscure issue had come to dominate the debate over homeland security. "If you asked me whether civil-service protection would be the stumbling block, I would have never guessed it," he said. In the Senate, he tried to finesse the issue, helping to draft compromise language that appeared to have the support of more than half the Senate. But by threatening a filibuster Senate Republicans kept the compromise amendment from coming to the floor. They insisted on an up-and-down vote on the whole bill. Fred Thompson, who managed the bill for the Republicans, said recently, "I'm kind of prejudiced toward Joe from a personal standpoint, because we've had such a good relationship, but I really don't understand what he did on homeland security. We kept asking ourselves, 'What is it they are seeing here that we don't see here? Why are they fighting us on this?' This is Presidential national-security authority—that ain't got two sides to it." As John McCain, the Arizona senator and Lieberman's close friend, said, "Very frankly, they should have gone ahead and caved on it. It gave the appearance of being unpatriotic and beholden to the unions. The Republicans got a twofer out of it."



Intentionally or not, Lieberman spent the fall doing the Republicans' bidding.

PAT OLIPHANT

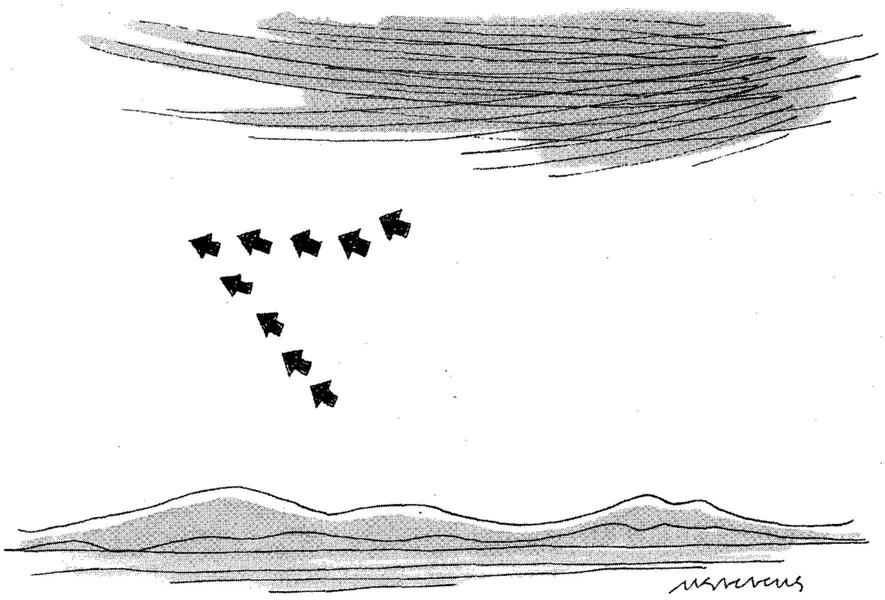
The decision to fight Bush on the union provisions of the homeland bill reflected a broader ideological evolution that Lieberman has undergone since Gore selected him, two years ago. At that time, Lieberman ranked as one of the more conservative Democrats in the Senate. He had questioned affirmative action, supported public funding of tuition vouchers for private schools, and generally irritated some of the Party's most stalwart constituency groups. During the campaign, Lieberman hewed closer to the party line on those issues, and as he weighs entering the Democratic Presidential primaries—with their left-skewing voters—he has reëstablished his bona fides with the heart of the Party. He voted against the Bush tax cut, denounced the Republicans' environmental policies, and, in homeland security, made a stand for unions.

While Lieberman and his fellow-Democrats were doing the bidding of the public-employee unions, President Bush, Vice-President Cheney, and other leading Republicans took the opportunity to accuse them of a lack of patriotism and a weakness on terrorism. On September 25th, Tom Daschle, of South Dakota, the Democrats' leader in the Senate, responded to this barrage with indignation. Lieberman, characteristically, did not. "Tom was quite right to blow the whistle on this politicization," he told me the next day in his office. "Would it have been right for me to say that the President sacrificed national security by not introducing a bill for eight months on this issue? The problem is, the Administration can't take yes for an answer. I'm the one who should be angry at Bush. It's my bill he's talking about when he's talking about Democrats who don't care about national security."

Lieberman couldn't bring himself to question the President's motives, because he doesn't like visceral politics. "Part of the conspiracy theory is that they want the homeland-security bill *not* to pass, so they can keep the issue alive before the election and blame it on us," he said. In the weeks that followed, of course, that is exactly what Bush and the Republicans did—with great success. In the Georgia Senate race, television commercials about the homeland-security debate were widely regarded as the key to the upset victory of the Republican Saxby Chambliss over the Democrat Max Cleland. Lieberman and his Democratic colleagues had been completely outmaneuvered.

Compounding the awkwardness for Lieberman was the other big issue of the fall—Iraq. Over the past decade, there has been no greater hawk on Iraq than Lieberman. If anything, he has been to the right of President Bush on the issue. Lieberman has long called for an American military effort to oust Saddam Hussein, with or without the support of the United Nations. In 1998, along with Senators McCain, Trent Lott, and Bob Kerrey, he sponsored the Iraq Liberation Act, which stated that it "should be the policy of the United States to support efforts to remove the regime headed by Saddam Hussein from power in Iraq." As Lieberman told me in his office, "I've said since the end of the Gulf War that I think we made a mistake not to take him out when his forces were in disarray." On Iraq, Lieberman was the President's biggest Democratic supporter.

When the White House decided to seek congressional authorization for an attack on Iraq, McCain and his fellow-Republican John Warner, of Virginia, asked Lieberman if he would join as the lead Democratic sponsor. Lieberman said yes, and persuaded other Demo-



A FLOCK OF CURSORS FLYING SOUTH FOR THE WINTER

crats to sign on as well. At a ceremony on October 2nd in the Rose Garden, Bush read a statement announcing an agreement on the bipartisan resolution on Iraq. Lieberman lavished praise on the President, calling his statement "eloquent, powerful, and convincing."

Intentionally or not, Lieberman spent the fall doing the Republicans' bidding. His stature gave the President's policy on Iraq the shimmer of bipartisanship; his leadership on homeland security led to a political debacle and policy failure for the Democrats. (After the election, the final version of the bill, which Lieberman voted for, basically adopted the President's position.) I asked him whether he was uncomfortable serving simultaneously as a punching bag and a cheerleader for the Bush White House. "It's odd," he said without emotion. "It happens in politics."

Lieberman, who was born in 1942, bears the scars of a happy childhood; his parents, who were Orthodox Jews, held him to the highest standards, which, in their view, he clearly exceeded. His father owned a liquor store in Stamford, and his mother ran the household and raised Joe and his two sisters. "I once took a college roommate home to Stamford," Lieberman told me, "and he said, 'After meeting your parents, I have the feeling that they greeted you every morning with a standing ovation.' " Lieberman went on, "I learned a lot of lessons about how you are supposed to behave from my parents and from my rabbi. It was all about making things better—*tikkun olam*, improving the world. We had an obligation to reach out. The rabbi that I had was very involved in the community. It was a different time, in a way, for the Orthodox movement in the fifties—much more centrist, if I can put it that way. That was all in me. I was reading history and intrigued by biographies of people who had made a difference. And then John Kennedy came along and swept me and all my generation with him."

At Yale, Lieberman's nickname was Senator. "We called him that because he had the same calm, statesmanlike affect that he does now, but in an eighteen- or nineteen-year-old it was a unique thing," Pete Putzel, a college and law-school friend who is now a criminal-defense lawyer in New York, said. "Joe was, even then, something of an establishment person." Lieberman's college years revealed a man with a precocious understanding of his own goals and the skills to make them real. He was a student leader—chairman of the *Yale Daily News* and, at law school, an officer of the Yale Democratic Club—but he also kept an eye on the world outside New Haven. In his senior year, he entered a program that would allow him to spend all his time writing his thesis about the head of Connecticut's Democratic Party, John Bailey, who was then in his sixties, and had run the state party for twenty years. Widely described as a political "boss," Bailey actually had little in common with leaders like Mayor Richard J. Daley, in Chicago. Bailey came from a moneyed family, rarely faced questions about his personal ethics, and generally shunned media attention. He was best known as an early champion of John F. Kennedy's Presidential ambitions. Bailey cared little for issues, leaving them to such protégés as Abraham Ribicoff and Chester Bowles. Instead, he focussed on building coalitions, avoiding primary fights, and choosing ethnically balanced tickets. This paradigmatic figure of the establishment was more than just a thesis topic for Lieberman. He turned his college work into a meticulously researched and frankly admiring book, "The Power Broker," which was published in 1966. There was, Lieberman wrote, "one quality which characterizes John Bailey's address to politics. He enjoys it as a game. He likes to win. He thrives on personal relations in pressurized political situations."

After graduation, Lieberman remained in New Haven to attend Yale Law School. (While in law school, he married Betty Haas, with whom he had two children. They divorced in 1981, and two years later he married Hadassah Freilich Tucker, with whom he has a teenage daughter.) It was a tumultuous period on campus. The university chaplain, the Reverend William Sloane Coffin, nursed an early activism among students in those years, and Lieberman, in a modest way, joined up with the cause, even taking a brief trip to Mississippi in 1963, to assist in a "mock election" for black voters. But it was John Bailey, not the protest movement, who was the formative influence on the aspiring politician. "Joe was no student radical, that's for sure," Terry Segal, a Boston lawyer who was also a classmate, said. "He was what was known then as a 'regular.' He was cautious. There were people who wanted the Yale Democrats to take positions on things like Vietnam, but Joe supported the Administration." For Bailey, and later for Lieberman, politics was a pursuit in which reasonable people crafted acceptable compromises with one another. "I was intrigued by how one makes a compli-

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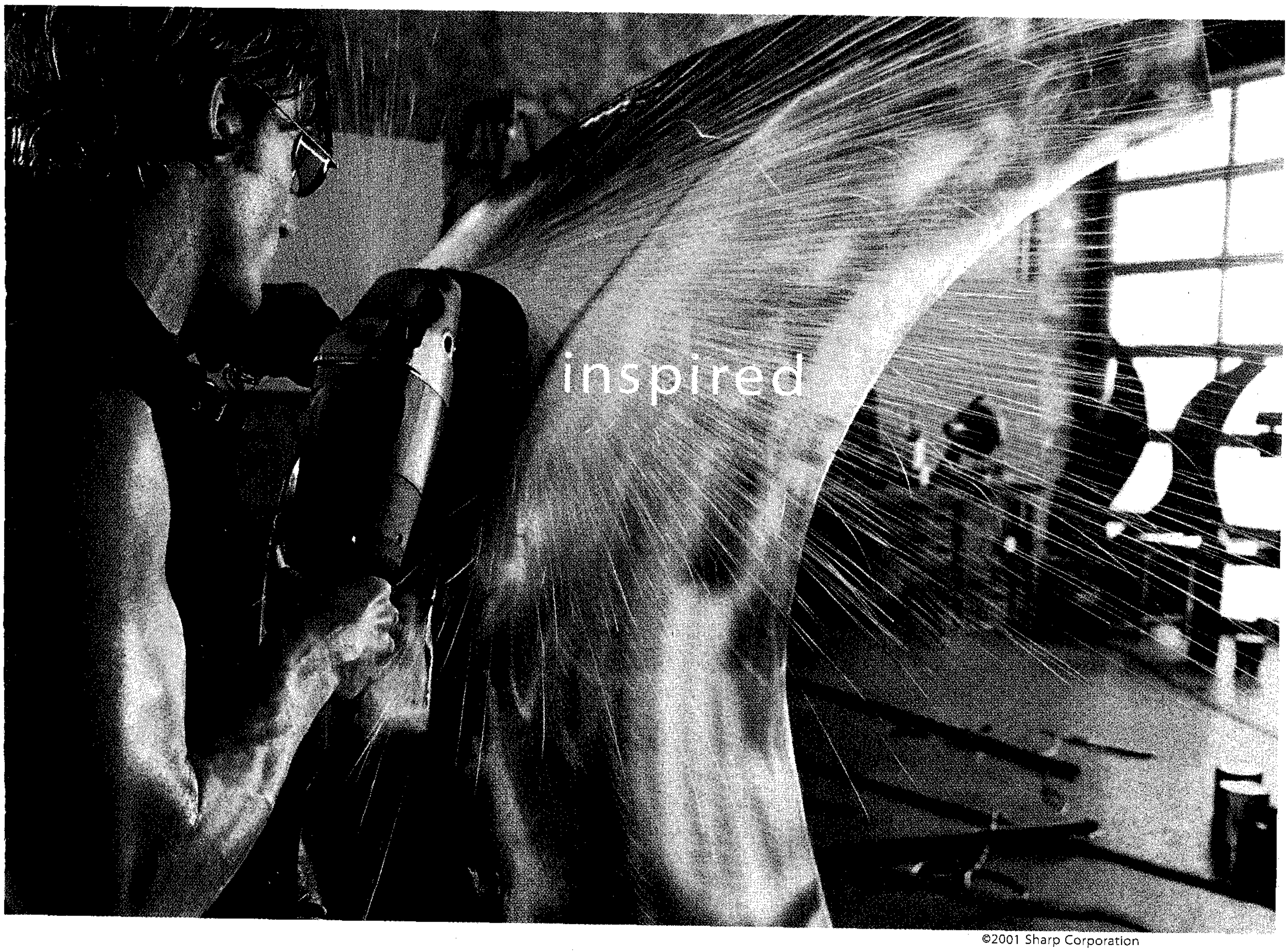

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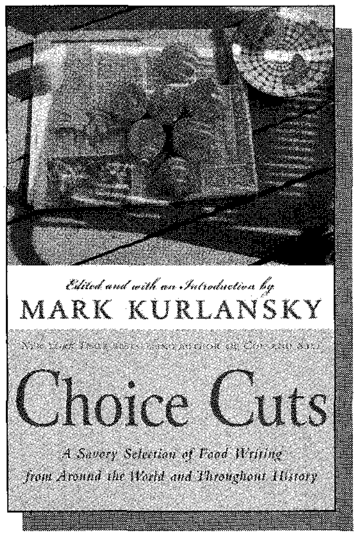
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cated, pluralistic system like our democracy work, and Bailey seemed to know how it worked," Lieberman told me.

In 1970, after a short stint at a private law firm, Lieberman decided to put Bailey's lessons to work, and ran for a seat in the state senate, knocking on thousands of doors with a corps of campaign volunteers that included Bill Clinton, then a Yale law student. At the age of twenty-eight, Lieberman scored a notable upset, and within five years he was the majority leader of the state senate. In 1982, when Lieberman was forty, he ran for state attorney general. In a complex four-way battle at the Democratic convention in Hartford—the kind of struggle in which his hero John Bailey had excelled—Lieberman outfoxed his rivals and won the nomination and the general election. Even in the semi-obscurity of his new office, he managed to gain a reputation as a strong environmentalist, and by 1988 he was looking to move up.

Michael Adler, who has long been a leader in Jewish and Democratic organizations in south Florida, hosted the fund-raiser for Lieberman in Miami Beach, and he told me how he came to support Lieberman's race for the United States Senate against Lowell Weicker, in 1988. "Weicker had always been a big friend of Israel, and I would say about ninety-five per cent of the politically active Jewish community down here was for him. But Weicker was also known as Castro's biggest friend in the Senate, and there was a lot of anger about that down here. So I knew that Lieberman was running, but Jorge Mas"—Jorge Mas Canosa, the unofficial leader of the hard-line Cuban-exile community—"told me that he was being supportive of his cause, and we should get behind him, too. So that's how I started working for Joe." Lieberman has remained loyal to the anti-Castro cause. "Joe Lieberman is my hero," Joe Garcia, the executive director of the Cuban American National Foundation, said recently. "He understands the struggle of the Cuban people for freedom."

In 1988, Weicker, an independent-minded Republican seeking his fourth term, seemed to be perfectly in tune with the Connecticut electorate. But Lieberman argued that Weicker had become lazy and complacent in the Senate, sometimes missing votes in order to take well-paid speaking engagements. Lieberman remained behind in the polls until his political consultant, Carter Eskew, designed a series of television advertisements that portrayed Weicker as a cartoon bear, drowsing when he should be working. "We ran at him from the left *and* the right," Eskew said. "The message was that Weicker has his head in the clouds and Joe has his feet on the ground. The ads delivered something that was true about Weicker—that he was a big gruff guy who was kind of distant from ordinary people." A late surge pushed Lieberman past Weicker by less than one per cent of the vote.

In the Senate, Lieberman began to display a distinctive ideological pedigree. More important than any partisan affiliation, he had a reverence for American institutions—among them family, faith, private enterprise, and government itself. It was thus not surprising that Lieberman fell in with a group of moderate Democrats who were trying to remake the Party through the Democratic Leadership Council, which served as a sort of idea factory to revitalize the Party. "At that time, we were looking at why our party kept losing the Presidency," Al From, the longtime head of the D.L.C., told me. "It was because we were losing the heart of the electorate, the people who go to work every day and play by the rules. It was around that time that we came up with our slogan: 'Opportunity, Responsibility, Community.' "

"The New Democrat movement was originally started in the mid-eighties by people who were particularly concerned with two themes," Lieberman told me. "And these themes worked their way through the Clinton years—to regain the confidence of the American people as a party that not only understood and cared about national security but was prepared to protect national security, and to rebuild confidence in the Democratic Party as a party that not only cared about economic growth but knew how to help create economic growth and understood that to do that you couldn't be anti-business."

To demonstrate that he wasn't anti-business, Lieberman became a champion of stock options, a cause dear to many high-tech executives, who felt that the broader use of options would help motivate corporate leaders and thus

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spur innovation. The cause suited his New Democrat sensibility, and Lieberman liked and trusted most businessmen. In the mid-nineties, the Financial Accounting Standards Board announced that it was going to recommend that all companies report the costs of stock options as a business expense. Its argument was straightforward: stock options were an expense, which companies already reported for tax purposes, and omitting their cost from income statements deceived investors about companies' true financial condition. The corporate community rebelled, especially high-tech companies, which relied heavily on stock options to compensate their executives. Lieberman sided with them, while Arthur Levitt, Clinton's chairman of the Securities and Exchange Commission, backed the accounting board. Lieberman initiated a "sense of the Senate" resolution that passed almost unanimously, denouncing the accounting board for considering the proposed change in the rules. "After that, I went to the accountants and told them to back off," Levitt said to me. "There was too much heat, and I was worried that the Congress would kill all standard setting if we continued to pick a fight on this issue." As Levitt writes in his new book, "Take On the Street," no one in Congress "was a more formidable foe than Senator Joe Lieberman of Connecticut."

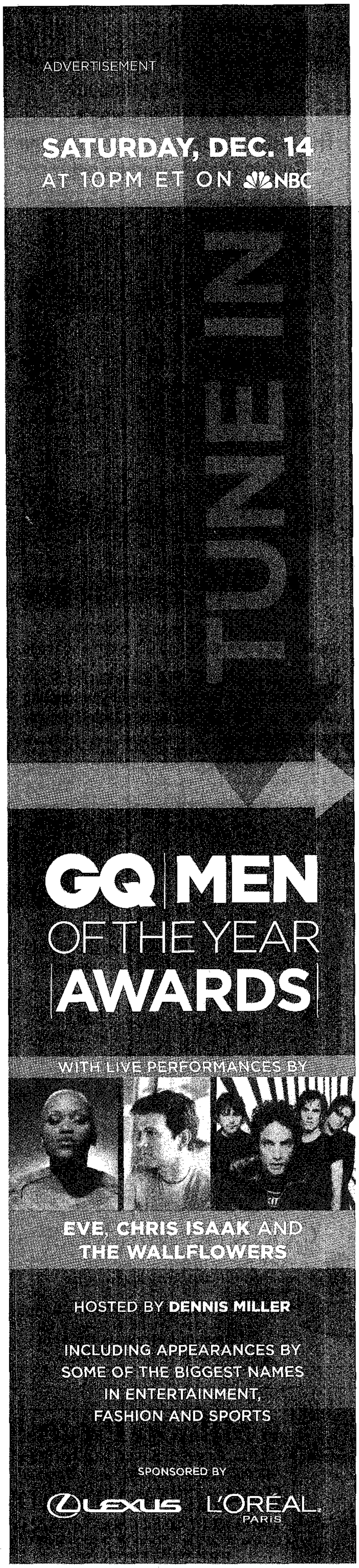
In October, Sandy Robertson, a prominent California venture capitalist, threw a fund-raiser for Lieberman's political-action committee, ROCPAC ("Responsibility, Opportunity, Community"), at his house overlooking San Francisco Bay, and he introduced Lieberman to the group with thanks for "all your work on stock options." The Senator responded with a rueful smile. "It's nice to be in a place where I'm not abused for supporting stock options," he said. In the financial scandals of the past year, the misuse of stock options has become a familiar theme. Even before a sympathetic crowd, Lieberman could muster only a sheepish defense of his position. "I continue to believe that stock options are a good idea, but they were abused by greedy and unethical executives. That wasn't clear to me then," he said. "Stock options democratize capitalism. As I heard from Silicon Valley and around the country, the industry was using options to attract people to small companies from big companies. Looking back, seven to ten million people got them." But, Lieberman acknowledged, "Clearly a disproportionate per cent of the options went to a small percentage of executives. That was disappointing."

On stock options, Lieberman had trusted the corporate executives, and they had let him down. Powerful people had said they were doing the public's business, but they were just helping themselves, and Lieberman was shocked, just as he was when President Bush turned against him on homeland security.

Lieberman's awkward position on the business collapses of the past year illustrates a broader problem that he and other Democrats face. They lambaste Bush and the Republicans for the souring economy, but they have yet to produce much in the way of alternatives. In a speech at the Nasdaq market site, in New York, on October 18th, Lieberman challenged the centerpiece of Bush's economic program—sort of. He said that the Bush tax cut, which he had voted against, was "far more expensive than we could afford and far less effective than our economy required." But, instead of calling for its repeal, Lieberman proposed to "redirect" the tax cut to businesses that invest in new technology and to companies that hire new workers. He also called for a tax rebate for low-income taxpayers. It is a more progressive approach than Bush's, but it's not all that different. Like the Republicans, Lieberman thinks that the best way to revitalize the economy is through tax cuts.

His conservative approach on the economy has brought Lieberman into a testy, long-distance debate with Al Gore. During the 2000 campaign, Gore often invoked the phrase "the people, not the powerful." Lieberman told me, "I didn't like the phrase, and to the best of my knowledge I never used it in the campaign, because it didn't really reflect what Al's record was. It didn't reflect the Clinton-Gore years. Why didn't it? Because it suggested class conflict, and we were not about that. It's very much not the New Democratic message. We were about growing the economic pie."

This summer, Gore responded to the critique in an Op-Ed article in the



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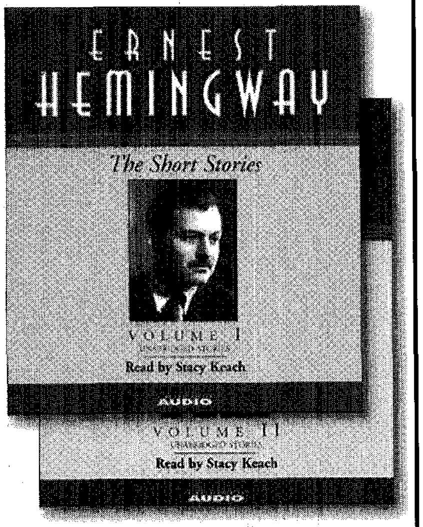

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Times, saying that he thought the business scandals of the past year showed that his message was exactly right. To some extent, there may be less to the controversy than meets the eye. At the moment, there seem to be few substantive differences between Gore and Lieberman on domestic issues, or among any of the other prospective Democratic Presidential candidates. Looking back on the 2000 campaign, Lieberman recalled a speech to union members. "One of the most satisfying experiences to me was to be in a union hall and to give the basic D.L.C. message about fiscal responsibility, balanced budgets, keeping interest rates low, creating economic opportunity, and to get a rip-roaring standing ovation," he told me. "I think people get it." But the acceptance of the D.L.C. message also presents a problem for Lieberman. If every Democrat subscribes to it, how then does Lieberman distinguish himself?

The answer, it appears, is values. "My record is that I have been more willing to talk the language of values and faith in politics than any other Democrat," he told me. "I believe it. It's central to my notion of how to be a good leader at this point, to find an appropriate, inclusive way to bring values and faith into the public dialogue. Some of this may be expressed through legislation, but a lot of it is the question of the leader as a spokesperson, as somebody who wants to lead by example." The invocation of values remains Lieberman's signature. In his second term, he and William Bennett, the conservative former Secretary of Education, began a crusade against violence and vulgarity in the entertainment business. And then, on September 3, 1998, shortly before the release of the Starr report, Lieberman gave his famous speech on the Senate floor about President Clinton's behavior with Monica Lewinsky. Noting his "deep disappointment and personal anger," Lieberman said that Clinton's behavior was "not just inappropriate, it is immoral and it is harmful, for it sends a message of what is acceptable behavior to the larger American family, particularly to our children."

This speech, more than anything, led to his selection as Gore's running mate, and it remains his defining moment in public life, just as his sense of values remains the touchstone of his political judgments. But the invocation of "values" seems a slender reed on which to base a Presidential campaign. As Lieberman defines them, they have almost no political content. Indeed, he is so worried that people will think he is trying to legislate morality that he insists his notion of values doesn't necessitate specific new laws. By condemning Clinton, Lieberman set himself up as the anti-Clinton, despite their similarities on many policy issues. This may have been enough to earn a Vice-Presidential nomination from Gore, who was trying to distance himself from Clinton's ethical travails, but Lieberman's judgmental nature may be less advantageous in a Democratic Presidential primary. "Clinton is revered among primary voters, and there are a lot of people who think Joe is sanctimonious on the whole subject," one Democratic strategist who is generally sympathetic to Lieberman says. There is also the question of whether talk of values—in the context of adultery and the like—will resonate in 2004 as it once did. Lieberman's belief in the importance of virtue in a politician's private life may not be justified in a post-September 11th world, where, for example, Rudolph Giuliani's colorful marital history was instantly forgotten.

For Lieberman, talk of values often leads to talk of religion, especially his own. "Part of my message has to do with just respect for faith, which continues to mean an awful lot to most people in this country," he said. "And that can be expressed through support of what's called faith-based initiatives, but that is, in my opinion, a small part of it. The larger part is just to be respectful of the constructive role that faith plays in the life of our country and in the life of a lot of people in our country."

Faith certainly plays a central role in Lieberman's own life. On a Sunday afternoon in October, at the Kings Point Performing Arts Center, just outside Fort Lauderdale, about twelve hundred residents of the retirement community there, nearly all of them Jewish, waited more than an hour to hear from Joe Lieberman. They smiled as they heard the sixty-year-old Senator introduced as "like a favorite younger brother." Lieberman had come to vouch for the Democratic nominee for governor, Bill McBride, a stolid corporate lawyer with a thick Southern accent. "Somebody asked me if Bill McBride was a mensch," Lieberman told the group. "I said, 'He's a *richtiger* mensch.' " The crowd gave a knowing laugh. (The Yiddishism means, roughly, "really great guy.")

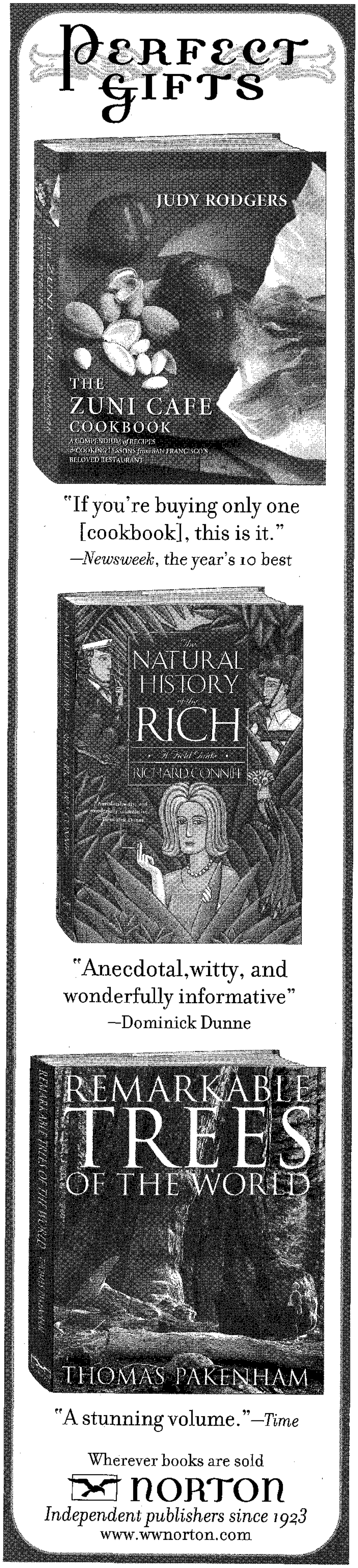
Lieberman has an infectious enthusiasm for his Jewishness. He may at times be a humorless scold about virtue in general, but he embraces his religious identity with joy and wit. One day in his office, I teased him about whether he had accepted gifts of clothing from his supporters, as his colleague Senator Robert Torricelli has allegedly done. Lieberman rolled his eyes and said that he had bought the suit he was wearing at a Brooks Brothers in Connecticut. "The salesman told me to look at the tag. It said, 'Made in Israel.' Unbelievable. Who ever heard of a suit made in Israel? Then he said, 'Be careful with the pants. Those Israelis are a little short with the fabric.' "

Among some Jews, Lieberman's nomination for Vice-President induced a kind of vertigo. On the one hand, the Anti-Defamation League chided him for excessive discussion of God and religion, including his invocation of George Washington's warning "never to indulge the supposition that morality can be maintained without religion." On the other hand, some in the ultra-Orthodox community complained when Lieberman was seen drinking water on Tishah-b'Av, a sombre day of fasting and reflection. Lieberman laughed about this minor flap. "It's the inner, inner world," he said.

These controversies now seem long forgotten, and Lieberman enjoys broad and deep support among Jews. If he runs, Jews, who make up an estimated four per cent of the national electorate, will likely provide the core of his financial support and a significant voting bloc in Democratic primaries. The broader question of whether any Jew can be elected President is more difficult. Most political observers seem to regard Lieberman's faith as more of an asset than a hindrance in a Presidential race. "You can't poll for this stuff—'Would you vote for a Jew?' " one leading Democrat says. "But the consensus seems to be that being Jewish, at least for him, is not a disqualification at all." Oddly, perhaps, it was Jewish political professionals who seemed most skeptical of any Jew's chances. "A President who doesn't celebrate Christmas?" one told me. "Forget it."

The issue may be less Lieberman's heritage than his heart. Lieberman campaigned energetically in 2000, even making trips to Texas to criticize Bush's environmental record, but he did not assume the customary role of the Vice-Presidential nominee as hatchet man, which would have been out of character for him. At one key moment, in fact, Lieberman's gentlemanly bearing may have hurt Gore's chances. Lieberman's debate with Dick Cheney on October 5, 2000, in Danville, Kentucky, was a decorous standoff; the polite exchanges allowed Cheney to prove that he was not the right-wing ideologue that his voting record in Congress suggested he was. Lieberman remains defensive about his performance in the debate. In a brief memoir of the campaign, "An Amazing Adventure," which will be published in January, he writes, "I was ready to get aggressive again in the debate with Cheney, because the differences between his record and mine and Al's were so stark. But surprisingly, the pollsters and consultants counseled otherwise." Today, some of these professionals remember their advice quite differently. "From the ticket's perspective, it would have been a more effective performance if he had constantly put Cheney on the defensive," one Gore adviser said. "It was a missed opportunity."

During the thirty-six-day post-election battle in Florida, Lieberman shied away from another fight. In the early days of the recount, he was a forceful behind-the-scenes advocate for insisting on the recount in the courts. "I was a hawk on the whole question of legal challenges, because I thought where we had a plausible right we should assert it and let the judge make a decision," he recalled afterward. But on Sunday, November 19, 2000, nearly two weeks into the recount, when political momentum began to swing against Gore, Lieberman switched tacks. On that day, the Bush campaign began assailing the Democrats for trying to ex-



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clude the votes of military personnel who were stationed overseas if their ballots did not comply with Florida law. Norman Schwarzkopf, the retired general and Bush surrogate, declared, "It is a very sad day in our country when the men and women [who] are serving abroad and facing danger . . . are denied the right to vote [because] of some technicality out of their control." The next morning, Lieberman appeared on "Meet the Press" to answer the charge.

Lieberman capitulated completely. "I would give the benefit of the doubt to ballots coming in from military personnel generally," he said. In the crucial days that followed, Republicans around Florida cited Lieberman's statement to persuade local canvassing boards to allow hundreds of invalid ballots to be counted. (A later investigation by the *Times* found that six hundred and eighty illegal absentee ballots had been included in the final total in Florida. The votes were divided in a way that would most likely have reduced, but not eliminated, Bush's margin of five hundred and thirty-seven.) Fighting the absentee-ballot issue, Lieberman told me, "seemed to me inconsistent with the over-all thrust of our campaign in Florida post-Election Day, which was to count every vote." The Republicans in Florida drew no such fine distinctions and clawed for every advantage. Lieberman's fastidiousness on the issue enraged many Democrats who were trying hard to elect him Vice-President.

In "An Amazing Adventure," Lieberman and his wife, Hadassah, who contributed a few passages, have written an almost substance-free book, a collection of innocuous anecdotes about how nice people were to them around the country. Unlike most politicians, Lieberman has written good books in the past, so this one seems especially hollow. Characteristically, Lieberman has a kind word for almost everyone. Of the debate with Cheney, he writes proudly, "Cheney and I disagreed on most issues, but we managed to disagree without being disagreeable." The book does accurately reflect Lieberman's philosophy about values, which amounts to little more than the exhibition of his virtuous personal life.

As for his Presidential candidacy, Lieberman seems to be modelling it roughly on his 1988 campaign against Weicker—taking on Bush from the right and the left. Lieberman remains more hawkish than Bush on Iraq, and more determined to bring the battle directly to the terrorists. And Lieberman will certainly use traditional Democratic issues like the environment and, to a lesser extent, tax fairness as well. As Lieberman put it to the ROCPAC group in Miami Beach, "internationalist, strong on defense, fiscally responsible, socially progressive—those are the key words."

It's a platform that shares a lot with the colleague Lieberman mentions most often: John McCain. "I love McCain," Lieberman told me. "I consider him one of my best friends in the Senate." McCain told me that he thought Lieberman would be a strong candidate. "He's a very decent, likable person who will wear well in a campaign," he said. "That is the kind of personality that does well in the retail politics of New Hampshire." I asked Lieberman whether he thought about asking McCain to be his running mate. "People have asked us that individually and together, and we always say we can't figure out which one of us would be Vice-President," he said, laughing. Then he turned serious. "You know, it's so far ahead. There's nobody I think better of, just in terms of integrity, purpose, honor, trustworthiness." McCain rejected the idea. "We will not run together," he said. "I won't leave the Republican Party, and he won't leave the Democratic Party."

I suggested to Lieberman that at least he and McCain feel the same way about George W. Bush.

"Exactly," he said. Then he corrected himself. "I probably don't feel as strongly negative."

Lieberman doesn't feel strongly negative about almost anyone in politics, and few seem to feel strongly negative about him. But in national politics that may be less of an advantage than it appears. Is civility really a political attribute that will mobilize an electorate? One of Lieberman's friends told me, "Joe's biggest problem is that he doesn't have any enemies." ♦

PEONIES

Heart transplants my friend handed me:
four of her own peony bushes
in their fall disguise, the arteries
of truncated, dead wood protruding
from clumps of soil fine-veined with worms.

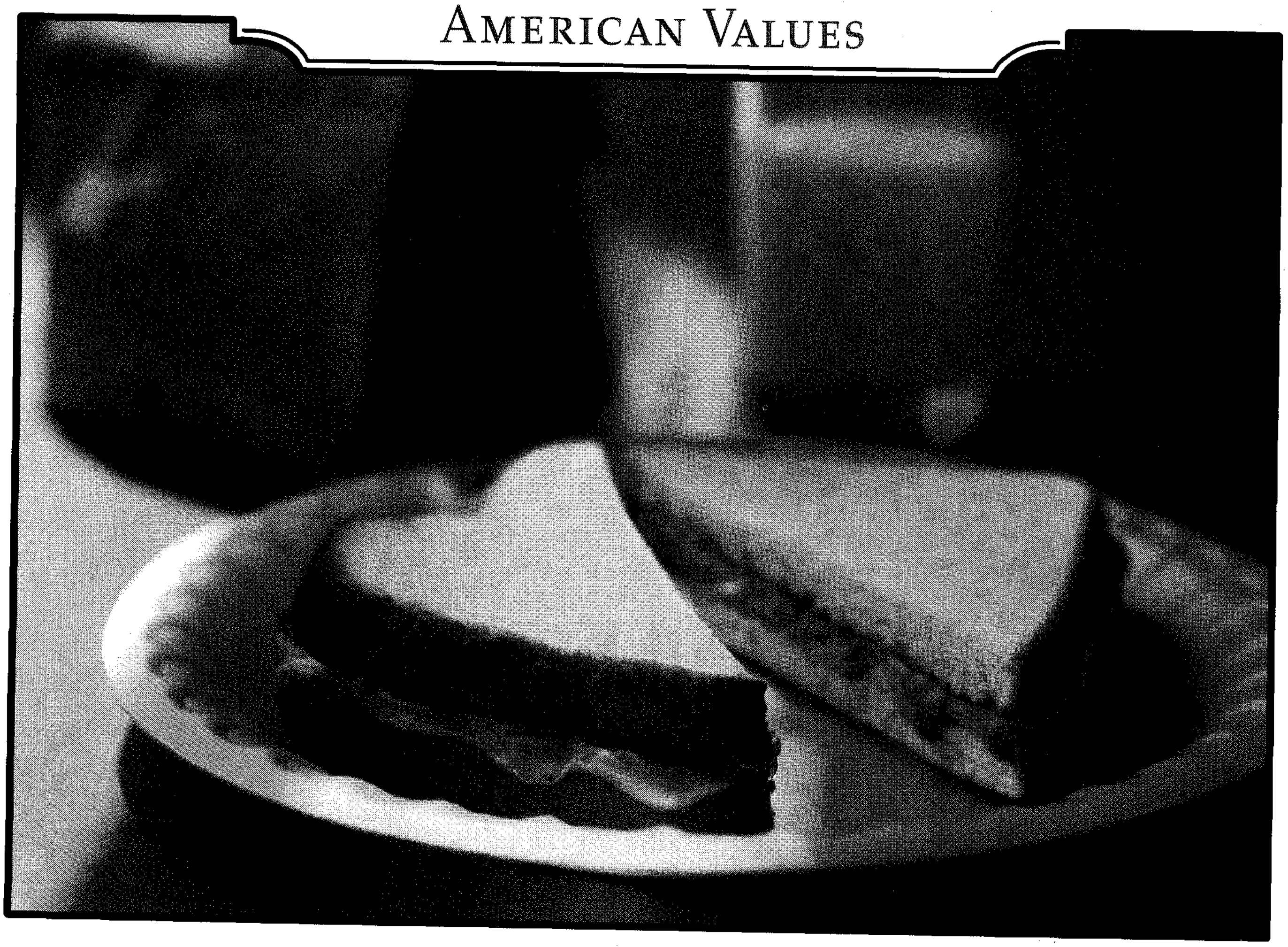
"Better get them in before the frost."
And so I did, forgetting them
until their June explosion when
it seemed at once they'd fallen in love,
had grown two dozen pink hearts each.

Extravagance, exaggeration,
each one a girl on her first date,
excess perfume, her dress too ruffled,
the words he spoke to her too sweet—
but he was young; he meant it all.

And when they could not bear the pretty
weight of so much heart, I snipped
their dew-sopped blooms; stuffed them in vases
in every room like tissue boxes
already teary with self-pity.

—*Mary Jo Salter*

AMERICAN VALUES



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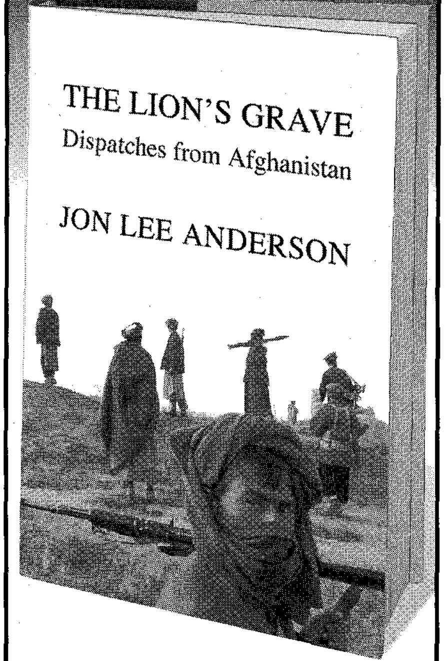

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POPULAR CHRONICLES

PARTY LINE

For a few telephone customers in Michigan, it's still 1955.

BY SUSAN ORLEAN

If you're one of those people who have three phone lines at home, plus a pager, plus a CDMA trimode cell phone with a Web browser and SMS, and you still want to upgrade your telecommunication system, you should meet Pat and Jim Bannick. Better yet, you should give them a call. Chances are they won't be on the phone.

"We're not really phone people," Pat said when I called her the other day at her home, in Dimondale, Michigan. "By the way, I couldn't believe Jim answered when you called. He never answers the phone. Once, I bought him one of those nice phones that you can walk around with—"

"A cell phone?"

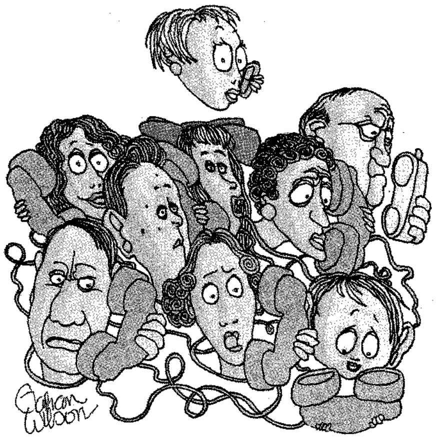
"Yes, I think that's it. The kind so you don't need a long cord on it?"

"Oh, you mean a cordless phone?"

"That's right. The kind without a cord. Anyway, a while ago I got Jim one of those, but he wouldn't even look at it, so I ended up returning it."

The Bannicks are among the last people in the state of Michigan, and possibly in the entire known universe, who still have their telephone service on a party line. A party line is not a current telecommunications option. SBC Ameritech, the Bannicks' phone company, has only a handful of them left, all of them in Michigan. (The Nevada division took its last party line out of service in 2001; the Southwestern Bell division shut down its last one in 1996; and Pacific Bell took all but one of its party lines out of service in 1997.)

Party lines are not to be confused with chat lines, party planners, or escort services: they are a prehistoric phone technology of copper-loop circuits that can be shared by as many as twenty telephones in separate locations, predating by several decades such advancements as three-way conferencing and the quack-ringing Mallard Duck Phone. On a typical party line, all the phones in all the houses sharing the line have the same phone number, and all the phones in all the houses ring whenever a call comes in for any one of them. Each household would be assigned a distinctive ring, so you could tell if the bell was tolling for you or for another one of the houses on your line. "Ours was a three-ringer," Pat said. "Or was it first a two-ringer? No, I think it was a three-ringer, and then we were a two-ringer."



GAHAN WILSON

"What year did you get your phone?"

"It was 1955," Pat said. "It was the year that we built the house."

"1955? That was the year Mary L. Kayes, of Dutchess County, New York, was convicted of refusing to yield her party line to someone wanting to report a fire."

"My goodness."

"What was it like sharing a phone?"

"Well, honestly, it was awful. We'd never get to use the phone, because someone was always on it. Plus, the phone rang and rang and rang all the time, since you had ten families sharing it. We did get into counting the rings, though. You'd hear the phone and you'd stop and wait and count to see if it was for you. That was kind of fun."

"Did you know that in 1950 three-quarters of all the phone service in the United States was by party line?"

"No," Pat said.

"Pat, can you hold on a minute? I've got a call on my other line."

“I suppose so.”

“O.K., I’m back. Sorry. So you were saying it was hard to share the phone.”

“Well, it was a pain. When we were on a ten-party line, you could hardly get a word in. And whenever we would pick up the phone to use it there would already be someone on it. We would pick up the receiver and hear voices—”

“I’m sorry, I have another call again. Can you hold for one second?”

“I guess so.”

“O.K., I’m back. So you were saying you’d pick up the phone and listen sometimes.”

“Sure,” Pat said. “I wouldn’t listen a long time, just for a minute or so. But the same thing would happen to us. We’d be on a call and suddenly someone would pick it up and hang up a bunch of times, so there would be click-click-clicking the whole time you were on the phone. This one lady would listen for a long time before she’d hang up.”

“Did people observe any kind of etiquette about party lines? Did they observe the Emily Post suggestion that if you share a party line and you have an emergency, you should pick up the phone and first say ‘Emergency’ in a loud voice and then say ‘Our barn is on fire’?”

“No, nothing special like that,” Pat said.

“Did you know who any of the other people on your line were?”

“We called once and tried to find out who they were, but the phone company wouldn’t tell us. We could tell that a lot of the families we shared the line with had teen-agers. We were getting pretty disgusted, because they would never get off the phone. Sometimes we’d have to make an important call and they’d be on for ages, and finally we’d pick up the phone and say, ‘Can you please just get off for five minutes and let us make the call, and then you can have the phone back?’ And usually they’d say no. This one lady in particular, she would say, ‘Well, I can’t get off. I’m in the middle of a long-distance call.’ ”

“You said that the number of people on the line went from ten to four or five?”

“In the sixties or seventies, we were down to sharing with just four other families. Then it was just two, and then finally just one. Now we have a party line, but we’re on it all by ourselves. Every once in a while, the phone company—it used to be Michigan Bell, but now it’s Ameritech, I think—the phone company calls us and says, ‘Well, guess what, we can give you a nice new line of your own,’ but we tell them we don’t want it! This is fine for us. And it’s cheap. We pay fifteen dollars a month and that’s it. We can’t have an answering machine or anything on it, for some reason, but that doesn’t really matter. The only problem we have isn’t with the party line; it’s with our phone. We have a rotary phone and I don’t know what to do when you get these recordings saying, ‘Push this number, push that button.’ We don’t have any buttons. When I really need to use a Touch-Tone, I go to my mother’s. She’s ninety years old, but she has a Touch-Tone.”

“How many phones do you have?”

“Are you kidding? Just one.”

This was when Jim got on.

“I don’t really know why we got a phone to begin with,” he said. “I think Pat wanted one. I didn’t grow up with a telephone. The first time I ever used one was after I graduated from high school. I’m seventy-three, and I grew up without electricity or running water or even a refrigerator, and certainly without a phone.”

“Do you use the phone now?”

“I have a need occasionally.”

“And what kind of equipment do you have now?”

“We used to have a black one, I believe, and now we have an ivory one.”

Jim then recounted the incident of the telephone without a cord with some discomfort. “I think Pat tried one of those touch phones or wireless phones,” he said. “I don’t know where she secured it, but I think she took it back.”

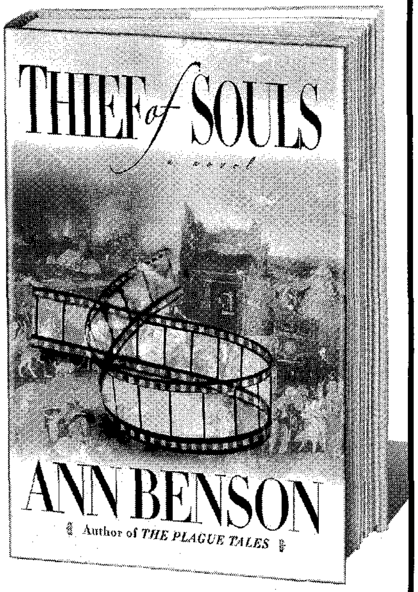
Pat is more open-minded. “I was with my sister a while ago, and while we drove around she used her cell phone in the car, and it was great,” she said, after Jim had turned the equipment back over to her. “The trouble is, if I had a cell phone, I’d probably call people.”

“Do you wish you’d kept the phone without the cord?”

“Yes, definitely. See, I thought it would be nice to have when Jim’s out in the garage working, and it’s time for dinner, and I have to scream and yell like a banshee to let him know that dinner’s ready. I thought if he had the phone I could just call him.”

“So are you still screaming and yelling?”

“No, we’ve got something better now,” Pat said. “We just installed a really nice dinner bell.” ◆



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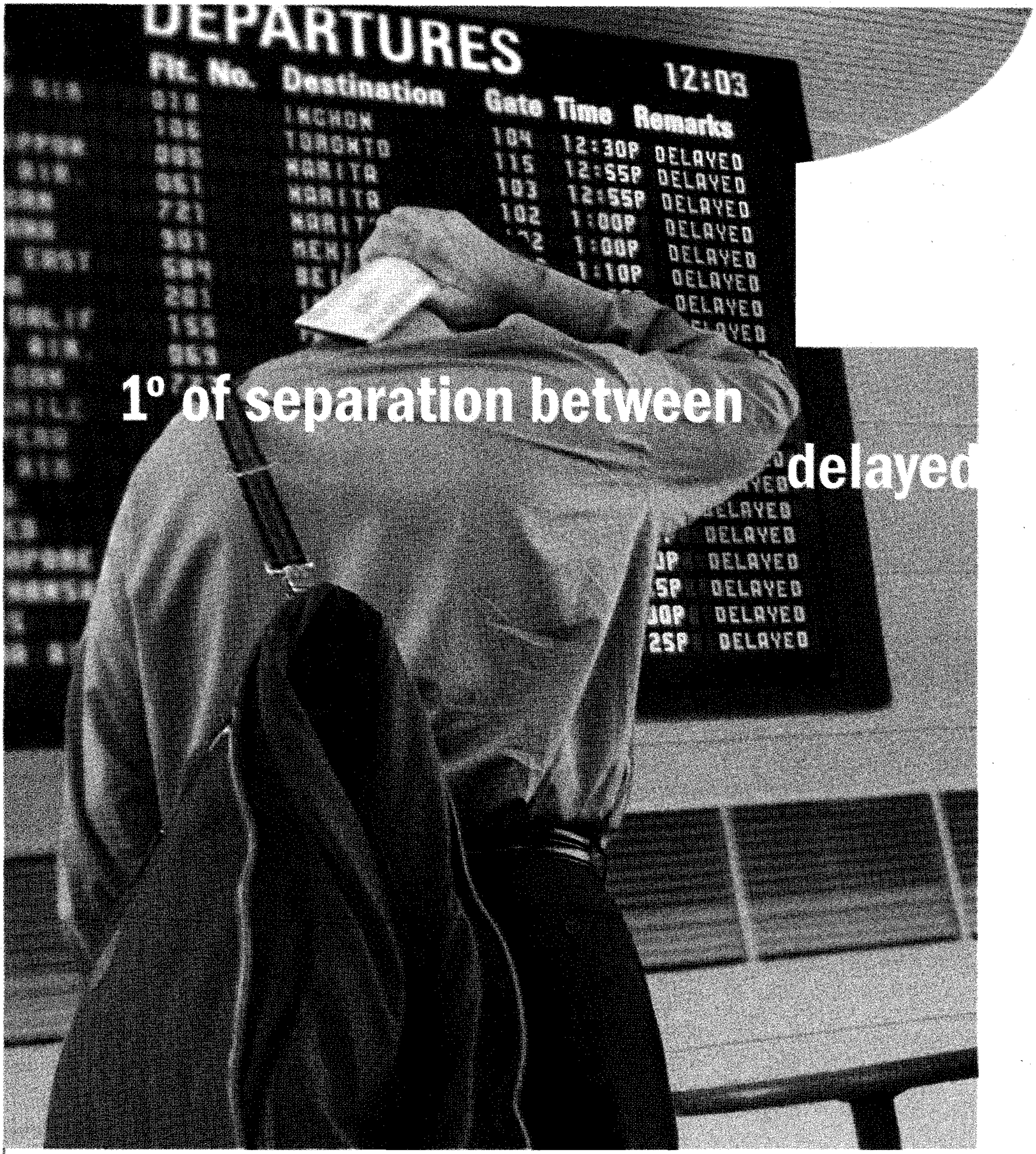

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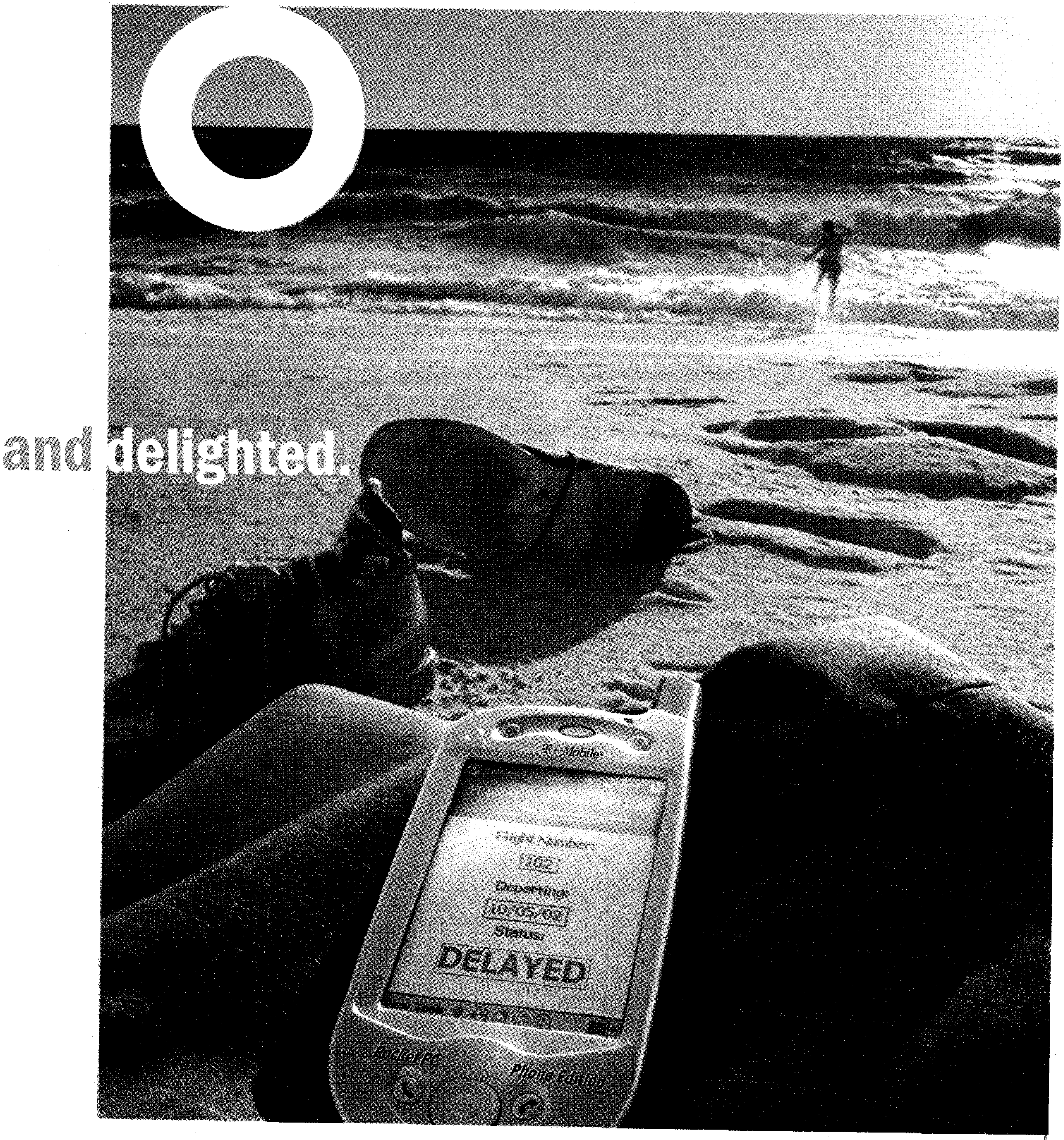

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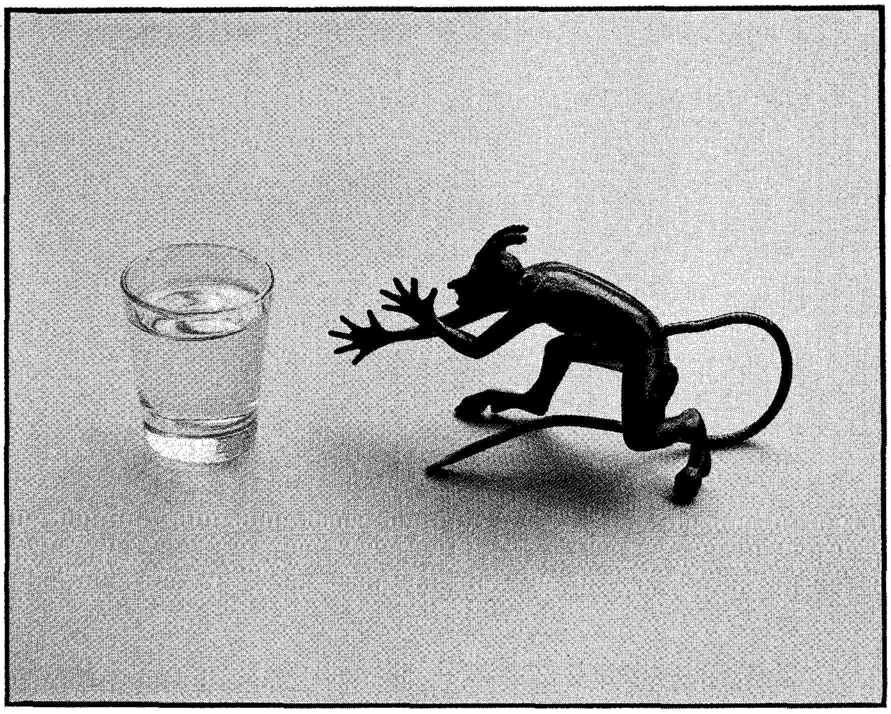
LETTER FROM MOSCOW

THE RUSSIAN GOD

Vodka celebrates its five-hundredth anniversary.

BY VICTOR EROFEYEV

In the beginning was the word. And the word was with God. And the word was "vodka." In the vast but secluded expanse of Russia, vodka gives and vodka takes away. At the start of the twentieth century, a third of the Russian Army was supported by the excise duties paid on the Smirnov brand alone. At the same time, vodka has inflicted more suffering on the country than any war has. Some fourteen thousand Russian soldiers were killed during the ten-year occupation of Afghanistan, but more than thirty thousand Russians die of alcohol poisoning every year. The yearly consumption of alcohol is higher here than anywhere else in the world (almost four gallons of pure alcohol per capita, at least half of it in the form of vodka), and vodka has scarred virtually every family, just as the Second World War and the repressions of Stalin's regime did. (The only thing I know about my mother's father, for instance—other than that he divorced my grandmother soon after they were married—is that he was an alcoholic.) The very mention of the word "vodka" triggers unpredictable behavior in Russians. It seems to punch a hole directly into the subconscious, setting off a range of odd gestures and facial expressions. Some people wring their hands; some grin idiotically or snap their fingers; others sink into sullen silence. But no one, high or low, is left indifferent. More than by any political system, we are all held hostage by vodka. It menaces and it chastises; it demands sacrifices. It is both a catalyst of procreation and its scourge. It dictates who is born and who dies. In short, vodka is the Russian god. And, in 2003, that god will celebrate his five-hundredth birthday.



In its essence, vodka is brazen and shameless. Photograph by Ruven Afanador.

One day in the early nineteen-seventies, Andrei Gromyko, the Soviet Foreign Minister, was travelling back to Moscow from his government dacha in the village of Zavidovo. His driver that day was Leonid Brezhnev, the General Secretary of the Communist Party. The two leaders were alone in the car, and Gromyko felt able to broach a sore subject. "Leonid Ilyich," he said, "something has to be done about vodka. The people are turning into alcoholics."

Brezhnev didn't answer. Five minutes later, Gromyko was regretting having raised the issue when Brezhnev suddenly replied, "Andrei, there's no way the Russian people can do without it."

I heard this anecdote from Mikhail Gorbachev—who had heard it from Gromyko himself—when I paid him a visit, earlier this year, to talk about the vodka anniversary. We sat in his sombre, English-style office on Leningrad Prospect, as his late wife, Raisa Maximovna, gazed down at us from a large oil portrait.

As everyone in Russia knows, Gorbachev disagreed with Brezhnev, and he became the only Russian leader in the history of vodka to launch a relentless campaign to eradicate it. "The statistics were appalling," he told me. "Injuries in the workplace, falling productivity, diminishing life expectancy, accidents on the roads and railways. In 1972, they discussed the problem in the Politburo, but deferred it. It was impossible to solve, because the state budget itself was 'drunk'—it relied on the income from vodka sales. Stalin set it up that way—temporarily, but there's nothing as permanent as a temporary decision. In Brezhnev's time, the 'drunken' component of the budget increased from a hundred billion rubles to a hundred and seventy billion—that was how much profit vodka brought to the state." He went on, "In the course of my career, I saw massive drunkenness in the Party. Brezhnev drank, especially at the beginning. Yeltsin even used the fact that he drank to attract women—'He's just the same as we are!' Women couldn't keep their hands out of his pants. But in the West they were afraid—he had his finger on the nuclear button."

In May of 1985, just two months after Gorbachev became the Party's General Secretary, he issued a decree entitled "On Measures to Overcome Drunkenness and Alcoholism." He began his war on vodka by testing the public's commitment, with a survey that was carried out in two hundred of the country's leading factories. The factory workers responded that they were against prohibition but in favor of restrictions on the use of alcohol. In practice, however, the anti-alcohol campaign turned into one of Communism's typical "bureaucratic excesses." Gorbachev destroyed vodka factories; closed most liquor stores; banned the serving of alcohol at receptions in Soviet embassies abroad; and, finally, even bulldozed vineyards in the Crimea, Georgia, Moldavia, the Kuban, and Stavropol—all to the howls and moans of the drinking nation, which soon dubbed him "the mineral-water Secretary." Although the campaign, according to Gorbachev, led to "wives finally getting to see their husbands"—the birth rate rose, and so did life expectancy—some people started hoarding sugar to make moonshine, thereby creating an extreme sugar shortage. Others poisoned themselves with more dangerous intoxicants, including brake fluid. I remember, in those days, coming across a sign in a village store not far from Kostroma, near the northern end of the Volga: "Eau de cologne on sale from 2 P.M." In the restaurants in Kostroma itself, the waiters were surreptitiously serving liquor in teacups.

Perhaps because Gorbachev came from south Stavropol, an area of Russia where, atypically, people consume mostly wine, he had failed to appreciate the extent of vodka's psychological influence. In the nineteen-eighties, in a country where vodka had become a currency that was often more reliable than the ruble, and where drunkenness was a factor in more than seventy per cent of murders, vodka proved to be stronger than the power structures that Gorbachev had at his command. When he saw the poisoning statistics, he told me, he gave up. Perhaps the statistics had been distorted, in order to undermine his authority, he suggested bitterly. But then he laughed and told an old joke on himself: "There was this long line for vodka, and one poor guy couldn't stand it any longer. 'I'm going to the Kremlin, to kill Gorbachev,' he said. An hour later, he came back. The line was still there, and everyone asked him, 'Did you kill him?' 'Kill him!' he said. 'The line for that's even longer than this one!'"

Little has been recorded about the actual invention of vodka, and there is really nothing surprising in that: in Russia, vodka is thought of as a sacred and eternal substance, impervious to historical interpretation. In 1977, American vodka companies accused the Soviet distillers who were trying to make it in the U.S. market of "inauthenticity," and the ensuing commercial scandal lent some impetus to the study of vodka's history. But the cruellest blow was struck later that year, when Poland, at the time a faithful member of the Warsaw Pact, declared that vodka was really a Polish drink and that Russians had no right to use the name "vodka" for the alcohol they were producing. Alarmed Soviet functionaries searched for someone who could reconstruct the genesis of the drink and settled on a historian named William Pokhlebkin, who soon produced a treatise showing that the Poles had begun making vodka several decades after the Russians. (Pokhlebkin was killed, two years ago, in his apartment in the town of Podolsk, some twenty-five miles south of Moscow; one rumor has it that the murderer was a vengeful Pole.)

Some historians compare the Russian national dependence on vodka to the Tatar yoke, and there's a certain historical irony to the analogy. According to legend, vodka was first produced by monks at the Chudov Monastery, in the Kremlin, in the late fifteenth century, around the same time that the Russians finally freed themselves of Tatar rule. At first, the monks worked with alcohol imported from Genoa, through the Crimean port of Feodosiya. Later, it became common to make vodka out of the local grain alcohol, which was produced from rye or wheat and soft spring water. Almost everything about this story seems overly symbolic: the involvement of men of God, the name of the monastery, which no longer exists (*chudov* means "miraculous"), and its setting in the Russian capital. Evidently, many of the documents relating to the birth of vodka were destroyed in the mid-seventeenth century by the Russian Orthodox Church, which later declared vodka an invention of the Devil. (This despite the fact that Russian clergymen themselves have always had a healthy respect for the drink.)

The act of mixing alcohol with water could be a carryover from Mediterranean culture—in particular from the ancient Greeks, who mixed their wine with water—but it is more likely that

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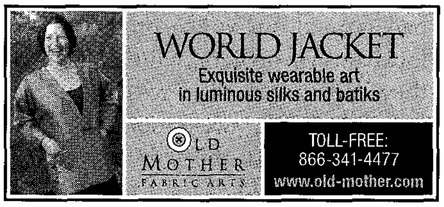
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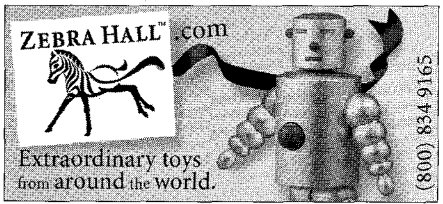
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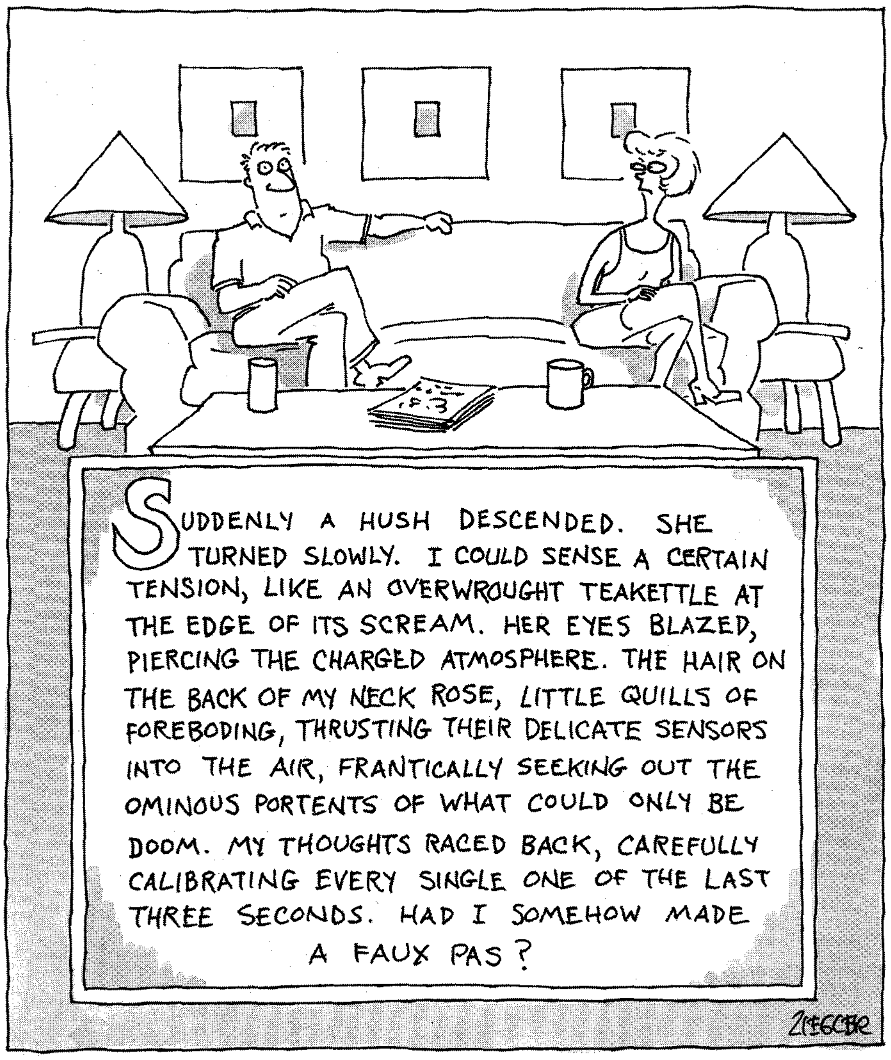
SUDDENLY A HUSH DESCENDED. SHE TURNED SLOWLY. I COULD SENSE A CERTAIN TENSION, LIKE AN OVERWROUGHT TEAKETTLE AT THE EDGE OF ITS SCREAM. HER EYES BLAZED, PIERCING THE CHARGED ATMOSPHERE. THE HAIR ON THE BACK OF MY NECK ROSE, LITTLE QUILLS OF FOREBODING, THRUSTING THEIR DELICATE SENSORS INTO THE AIR, FRANTICALLY SEEKING OUT THE OMINOUS PORTENTS OF WHAT COULD ONLY BE DOOM. MY THOUGHTS RACED BACK, CAREFULLY CALIBRATING EVERY SINGLE ONE OF THE LAST THREE SECONDS. HAD I SOMEHOW MADE A FAUX PAS?
ZIEGLER

the mixture was initially intended as a disinfectant for the treatment of wounds. Vodka quickly escaped the grip of medicine, however, and transubstantiated into the "burnt wine" some Swedes reminisced about after an expedition to Moscow, in 1505. A few decades later, that burnt wine had set all of Russia aflame. The drink became so popular that by 1533 the Russian state had farmed out vodka production to local tavern owners, who—although they had to kiss the Cross and swear to tell the truth—were soon wallowing in corruption. In the centuries before, when people had drunk mead, drunkenness was reserved for occasions of "revelry"; vodka transformed that revelry into the status quo.

The good times were short-lived. In 1648, a tavern revolt broke out in Moscow and then spread to other towns. The situation was dire. A third of the male population was in debt to the taverns, and for several years the peasants had been so drunk that they hadn't bothered to cultivate the land. In an attempt to put things right, the state assumed a monopoly on the sale of vodka, which meant that the vodka distillers' profits fell. This was when vodka acquired its long-term doppelgänger—home brew. People learned how to make a vodka-like drink at home and, in defiance of all prohibitions, continue to make it to this day. (Rural populations consume as many as four and half bottles of home brew for every bottle of vodka.) So far, the state has abrogated its own monopoly six times (the last time under Yeltsin, in 1992), and then reinstated it (in 1993, Yeltsin took fright at the rapid criminalization of the vodka sector), but each reversal has only tightened the grip of dipsomania.

"I feel sorry for the Russian people, who drink so much!" Tsar Alexander III told his Minister of Finance, Sergei Witte. In 1894, Witte launched a wide-reaching initiative to improve the quality of vodka, and thereby firm up the state monopoly. Dmitry Mendeleyev, the god of Russian chemistry, was brought in to do the job. Until then, vodka had been made simply, by processing equal volumes of alcohol and water with a number of trace additives to soften the taste. (Stolichnaya, for instance, has a small amount of sugar.) The water-alcohol mixture was then filtered, using charcoal. Mendeleyev observed that when alcohol and water were combined there was a mysterious contraction of the total mixture. (Five hundred millilitres of water and five hundred millilitres of alcohol produce nine hundred and forty-one millilitres of vodka.) In order to obtain what he asserted was the optimum proportion of alcohol—forty per cent—Mendeleyev said, water and alcohol needed to be measured not by volume but by weight. At the same time, the Russian physiologist Nikolai Volovich determined that the most beneficial dose of vodka to stimulate the working of the heart and to cleanse the blood was fifty grams a day. Temperance societies began to form across the country, but before they could have an effect the First World War began, and prohibition was introduced.

Prohibition remained in force during the 1917 Revolution and the civil war that followed, though followers of Reds and Whites alike took advantage of the melee to loot the vodka warehouses and drink to excess. (Pokhlebkin, in his treatise, jocularly suggested that the Reds won because they guarded the warehouses better and punished drunkenness by shooting.) Prohibition was repealed under Lenin in the mid-twenties, in a bid for popularity. He authorized the production of *rykovka*, a milder form of vodka, which was thirty-per-cent alcohol. (It was named after the finance minister at the time, Aleksei Rykov.) But after Lenin died, vodka returned to its full strength, and its sale helped pay for the socialist industrialization of the U.S.S.R.

When the war against Hitler began, every Russian soldier at the front was given a daily "commissar's ration" of a hundred grams, as stipulated by the

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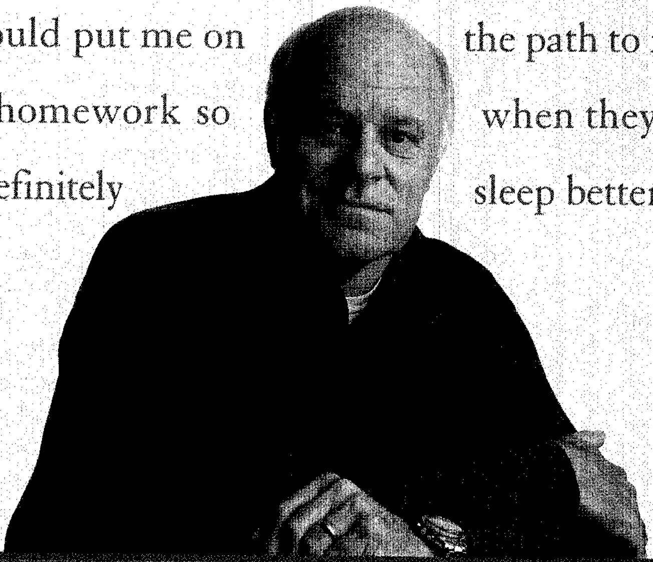

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Ministry of Defense. Vodka manufacturers claim that the drink was as important as Katyusha rocket launchers in the victory over Nazism, because it bolstered the Russian Army's spirits. But Vladimir Nuzhny, a professor of narcology and one of Russia's best-known theoreticians of alcoholism, thinks otherwise. Those hundred grams were a disaster for the entire postwar generation, he told me. Alcohol dependence soared, and the result was a downward spiral of dissolution that continued into the nineteen-sixties. When the monopoly on vodka production was abolished again, in the early nineteen-nineties, the vodka sector was thrown into chaos: the rich New Russians, who kick-started the motor of Russian "bandit" capitalism, were essentially old-fashioned bootleggers.

Mendeleyev not only created the classic standard for Russian vodka; he also gave the concoction its name. For several centuries, official documents had referred to vodka as "grain wine." To this day, there are probably more euphemisms for vodka than for anything other than the male sex organ. Its aliases range from "hot water," "the monopolka," "the bubble," "crankshaft," "the bitter stuff," and "the white stuff" to the classic Soviet "half litre" and "quarter bottle" (also known as a "daughter"). Etymologically, the word "vodka" is derived from *voda*, the Russian word for "water." (The addition of the letter "k" makes it diminutive.)

The word appeared in standard Russian dictionaries in the mid-nineteenth century, but the upper classes and the urban middle class still regarded the drink as uncultured, almost obscene. Vodka was consumed primarily by the lower classes (hence the Russian idiom "drunk as a cobbler"). This was a result both of the quality of the vodka available (most of it was made from wood alcohol and smelled strongly of fuel oil) and of the barbarous "tavern" fashion in which it was consumed (it was illegal in taverns to eat food with liquor). Until the late nineteenth century, vodka was not even bottled—there weren't enough bottles—and it was measured by the *vedro*, or pail (equal to twenty-five pints).

The secret of the word "vodka" lies in its effect on the masses—in the mixture of lust and shame it inspires. The alcoholic views vodka as a woman; he is afraid to reveal his feelings for her, and is at the same time incapable of restraining them. The very mention of her name creates an atmosphere of conspiracy and mystical exaltation that provokes a kind of pagan stupor. In its essence, vodka is a brazen and shameless thing.

Vodka is unlike other forms of alcohol in that there is no justifiable excuse for drinking it. The Frenchman will praise the aroma of cognac, and the Scotsman will laud the flavor of whiskey. Vodka, however, is colorless, odorless, and tasteless. At the same time, it is an acrid and irritating drink. The Russian gulps his vodka down, grimacing and swearing, and immediately reaches for something else to "smooth it out." The result, not the process, is what's important. You might as well inject vodka into your bloodstream as drink it.

But then that's not entirely true, as all Russians, with the exception of the estimated five per cent of the adult population that doesn't drink, can tell you. Vodka is like a song—it may have banal lyrics and a simple melody, but the combination, like that of alcohol and water, is more than the sum of its parts. In respectable society these days, vodka is served at a table set with a range of dishes perfected in minute detail by the old Russian landowners. The vodka ceremony has its own traditions ("No eating after the first glass"), its superstitions and catchphrases ("Vodka is the aunt of wine"), its schedule (ordinary Russian drunks are distinguished from alcoholics by the fact that they wait until five in the afternoon to start drinking), and its accoutrements (fish, salted gherkins, pickled mushrooms, jellied meat, and sauerkraut)—not to mention its toasts, which are the perfect excuse for consuming alcohol while simultaneously focussing on the general conversation. Every Russian knows that drinking vodka with *pelmeni*, a kind of meat dumpling, can induce a high not far short of nirvana.

Vodka has taken control of the will and conscience of a substantial sector of the Russian population. If you add up all the time that Russians have devoted to vodka and gather together all the vodka-fuelled impulses of the soul—the fantasies, the dreams, the weeklong

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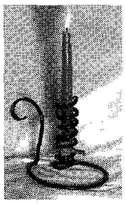

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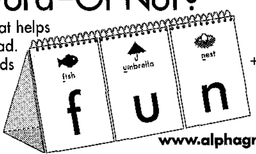

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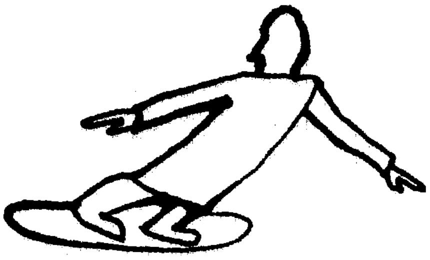
binges, the family catastrophes, the shamefaced hangovers, the murders, suicides, and fatalities (favorite Russian pastimes include choking on your own vomit and falling out of a window)—it becomes clear that behind the official history of the Russian state there exists another dimension. Despite all the misadventures and tragedies of Russian alcoholism, the spotlight here belongs to the inexplicable, almost universal delight that Russians take in the notion of drunken disorder. That delight has been recorded over the centuries in the accounts of astounded foreign travellers, such as the Dutch diplomat Balthazar Coet, who visited Moscow in 1676 and wrote, "We saw only the scandalous behavior of debauchees, glorified by the thronging crowd for their proficiency in drunkenness." We encounter the same philosophy in the samizdat best-seller from the Brezhnev era, Venedikt Erofeyev's "Moscow to the End of the Line," a manifesto of indiscriminate social dissidence and a frank apologia for the metaphysics of drunkenness. "Everybody in Russia who was ever worth anything, everybody who was ever any use to the country," the book asserts, "every one of them drank like swine."

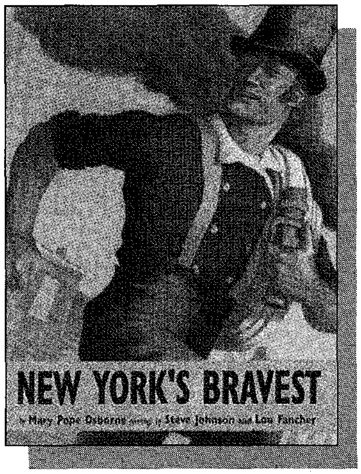
Drinking vodka is a social activity. When John Steinbeck was in Moscow, the story has it, it took him a while to understand that the three fingers two friendly guys waved at him were an invitation to split a bottle of vodka three ways; he ended up drinking *à trois* with them in a doorway anyway, apparently with no regrets. But the vodka-drinking ritual also involves a harsh questioning of human conventions. It demands freedom from history, from responsibility, from health, even from life itself. This condition of free fall, of moral weightlessness and philosophical incorporeality, represents both an attack on the "rational" West and a haughty assertion of Russian truth.



Gorbachev is of the opinion that "vodka has done more harm than good to the Russian people," but Evgeny Popov, a contemporary Russian writer who comes from hard-drinking Siberia, holds the opposite view. In conversation in the bar of Moscow's Central Writers' House, Popov claimed that vodka has helped the Russian people counter the stress of living in a less than perfect nation. Vodka has provided access to a private life that is closed to the state, a place where it is possible to relax, to forget your troubles, to engage in sex with the illusion of free choice. Nowhere else has the relationship between literature and drink been as intense as it is in Russia. The revolutionary Nikolai Nekrasov, the émigré Aleksandr Kuprin, the leading Stalinist writer Aleksandr Fadeyev, the Nobel Prize winner Mikhail Sholokhov, and the man who is probably the best Russian writer of the twentieth century, Andrei Platonov, have all had love affairs with the bottle. As Popov told me, "Vodka makes it easier to think up literary plots."

The philosophy of vodka has its dark corner of violence. Russian despots with a sadistic streak, like Peter the Great and Stalin, have taken pleasure in forcing their guests to drink more than they could handle. Other hosts force-feed their guests vodka in order to reduce the social distance between them, to humiliate and deride or take advantage. Vodka is capable not only of generating bravado but also of inducing the excruciating feeling of remorse and self-abasement that is one of the essential elements of the ambivalent Russian personality. Hence the question that the Russian alcoholic traditionally asks his drinking companion: "Do you respect me?" The drinking Russian suffers from a marked divergence between his sober impulses and his drunken ones. It is not easy to govern an entire people in this state.

A vodka museum will open in Moscow next year, and a large festival is being planned to mark the five-hundredth anniversary of the drink, but no one was able to provide me with a satisfactory explanation for why that anniversary is being celebrated in 2003. I decided to try asking the distillers themselves. I started by attempting to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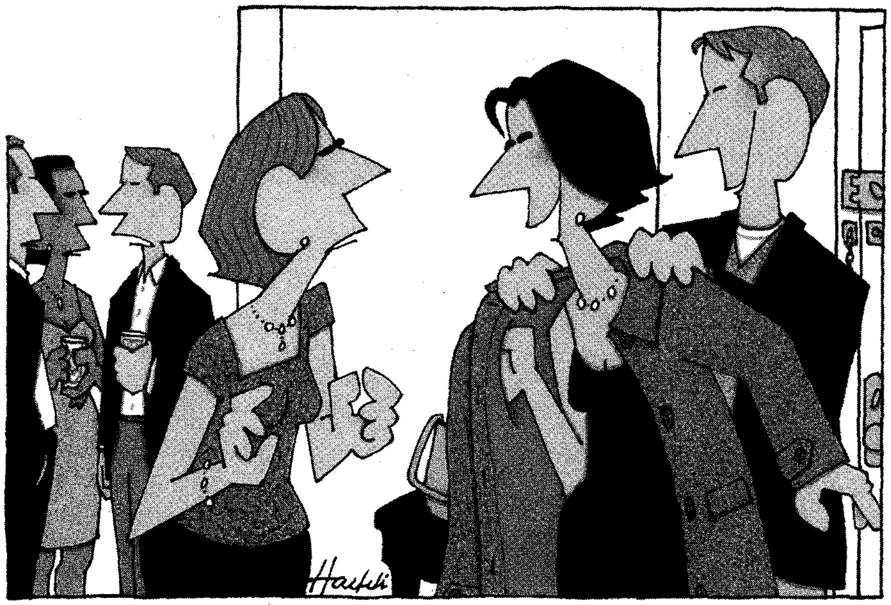
infiltrate Moscow's largest vodka factory, which produces the high-quality brand Crystall. But it proved to be an almost impregnable fortress—I had to get state backing just to enter the production premises. The gloomy brick factory building was erected beside the river Yauza during Witte's state-vodka monopoly in 1901. Because the famous Molotov cocktails were produced there during the Second World War, it became a target for German bombing raids. The factory was damaged, but it survived, continuing to supply the front with both Molotov cocktails and vodka. It now produces up to five million bottles a month, and the sight of alcohol pouring into numberless bottles there immediately summoned up the vision of the million Russian throats that empty those bottles every day. Inside, the Crystall factory has the sublime atmosphere of a cathedral. It is absolutely sterile. There is almost no smell of alcohol, and the employees wear white coats. The vodka is produced on a specialized production line, developed in Italy and Germany, in which alcohol is mechanically mixed with water (taken from the main Moscow water supply but specially filtered), and then the vodka is bottled, sealed, and packed into boxes. Most of the machine operators are women, because, as my female guide told me, women are more suited to monotonous work. The factory's melancholic director, Aleksandr Timofeyev, who has since been fired, was exceedingly courteous and evasive in conversation. The only thing I managed to get out of him was a confession that he himself didn't drink, so he didn't really know much about vodka. He sent me off as soon as he could with a very fine bottle.

To get answers, you have to go to the top, a truism that was confirmed by my conversation with Sergei Viktorovich Zevenko, who was known, when I saw him earlier this year, as the "vodka king." Zevenko was the director of Rosspirtprom, the government-run company that currently controls forty per cent of vodka production in Russia and oversees more than a hundred high-quality vodka factories. But he told me he had been drunk only once in his life, right after high school, when he was seeing off a friend who was joining the Army. Now, at the age of thirty-four, he recalled the episode with disgusted laughter: "It took me an entire week to recover. It was a severe shock to my system."

Zevenko had a complicated life. His competitors envied his sovereign status. His efforts to persuade Russians to eschew the cheaper forms of vodka, which are more likely to cause fatal liver disease, for the higher-quality, state-controlled varieties had earned him, among New Russians, the status of "a



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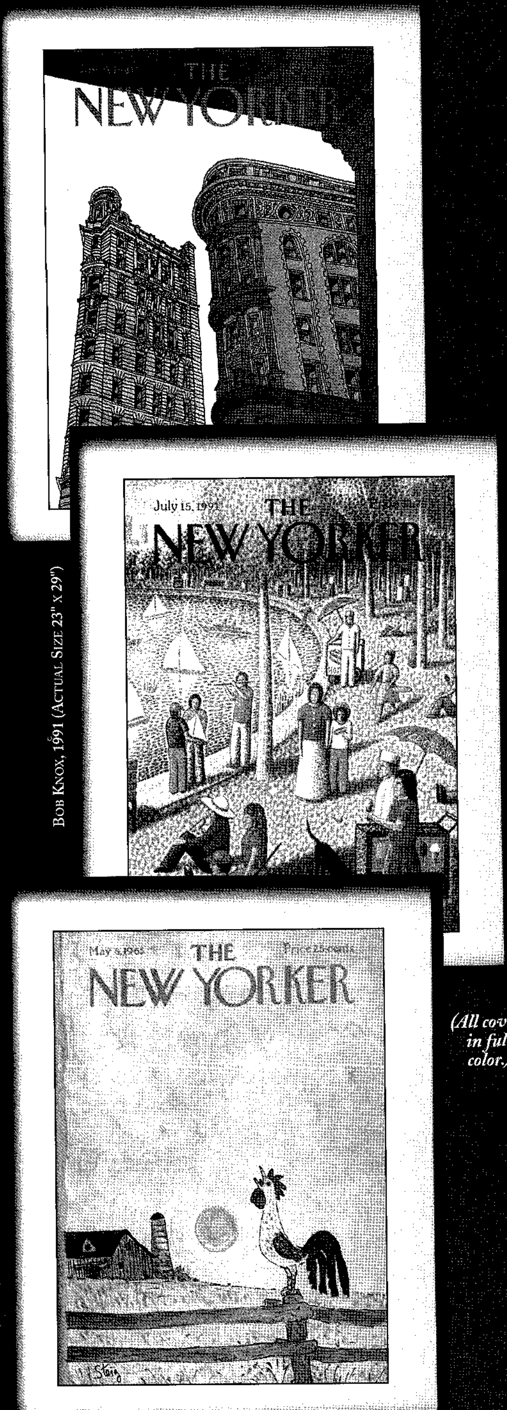

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*ılated, from the Russian,
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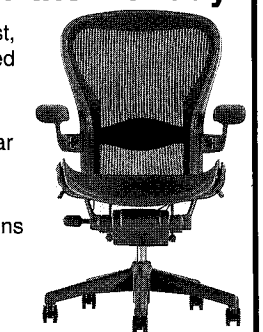

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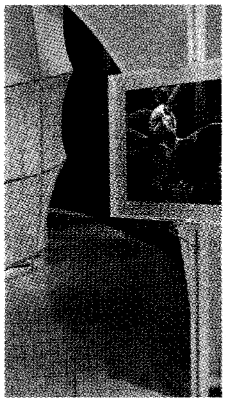

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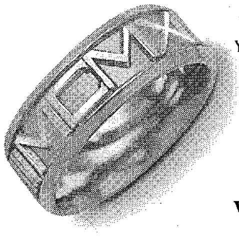

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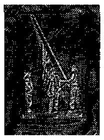

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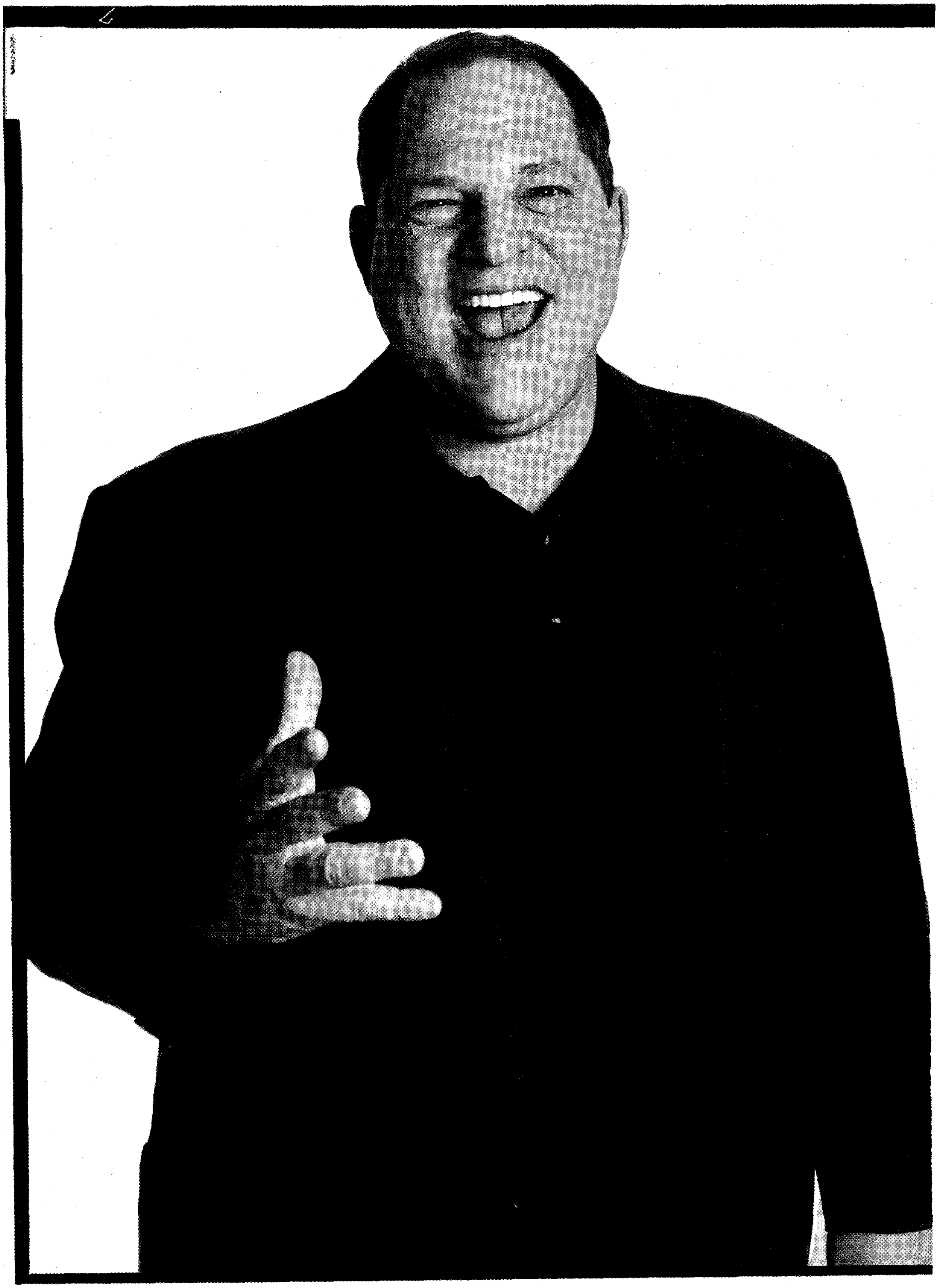


ANNALS OF COMMUNICATIONS

BEAUTY AND THE BEAST

Harvey Weinstein has made some great movies, and a lot of enemies.

BY KEN AULETTA

I

Harvey Weinstein sometimes believes that Hollywood is out to get him. He believed this even before it was true. Weinstein, or Harvey—in the movie business, there is only one Harvey—believes that he is a target partly because Miramax, the studio that he co-founded with his brother, Bob, is based in New York. Mostly, he believes that the movie industry resents the success he's had in the past two decades, making movies—sometimes brilliant, innovative movies—that Hollywood wouldn't touch.

The view from Hollywood is a little different; people there say that they are repelled by his behavior, which can be spectacularly coarse, and even threatening. That may seem a curious reaction; after all, abusive behavior—starting with the casting couch—became something of an art form in the early years of Hollywood and never really went away. Adolph Zukor, Louis B. Mayer, Jack and Harry Warner, Harry Cohn, William Fox, and Samuel Goldwyn were, each in his own way, bombastic, bullying personalities. And in today's Hollywood tantrums are commonplace. But even in this context Harvey Weinstein stands out. Those who have been witness to his outbursts, public and private, describe not a lovable rogue but, rather, a man with little self-control, whose tone of voice and whose body language can seem dangerous; at times, he appears about to burst with fury, his fists closed, his teeth clenched, his large head shaking as he loses the struggle to contain himself.

At the Cannes Film Festival last May, Weinstein, who is six feet tall and weighs two hundred and fifty pounds, spotted Barry Diller, the chief executive of Vivendi Universal Entertainment. In a loud voice, he said to Diller, who is a fit five feet nine, "Why'd you call me a bully?"

"You *are* a bully," Diller replied, and the two studio executives stood toe to toe on the terrace of the Hôtel du Cap, as an audience of actors, directors, models, and fellow-executives watched. Diller thought that there was going to be a fistfight.

Weinstein had been provoked by an article in which Diller was quoted as calling him a thug. Diller had done so because in Los Angeles the previous January, on the night of the Golden Globe awards, Weinstein had threatened a Universal executive. Although Miramax had received three Golden Globes, its best-picture candidate, "In the Bedroom," had not won, and Weinstein was irate; the Golden Globes often presaged the Academy Awards, in March. What was more, he knew of an upcoming story in the *Post* suggesting that he had orchestrated a whispering campaign to impugn "A Beautiful Mind," a best-picture candidate from Universal and DreamWorks SKG. Stacey Snider, the chairman of Universal, told me that Miramax, and specifically Harvey Weinstein, was to blame. (It was falsely rumored that John Nash, the mathematician on whom the movie is based, was an anti-Semite.) Weinstein says that the *Post* story originated with Universal and DreamWorks. Although Snider denied this, Weinstein said, "I blamed her."

After the Golden Globes ceremony, the Creative Artists Agency gave a party at the restaurant Muse for six hundred people. Snider was exhilarated, because "A Beautiful Mind" had won several awards, including best drama. When Weinstein saw her in the crowd, he headed her way and cornered her in an alcove across from the bar. To the petite Snider, he was a fearsome sight—his eyes dark and glowering, his fleshy face unshaved, his belly jutting forward half a foot or so ahead of his body. He jabbed a finger at Snider's face and screamed, "You're going to go down for this!"

"He was in my space," Snider said later. She assured him that she had not accused him, and that they were friends. Weinstein, in one of two versions of the incident he later gave me, said, "I never raised my voice to Stacey." By saying she would "go down," he meant that her movie would get tarnished.

The next morning, Snider telephoned Jeffrey Katzenberg, the co-founder of DreamWorks. Snider said, "I felt unsure about whether or not Harvey could become reasonable," and she wanted DreamWorks—Universal's equal partner in "A Beautiful Mind"—to be aware of the threat. She also knew that in 1993, when Katzenberg was the president of Walt Disney Studios, he had engineered Disney's acquisition of Miramax. Although Weinstein and Katzenberg often fought, Weinstein considered him one of his closest friends in the business.

Katzenberg, too, believed that Weinstein was behind the campaign against "A Beautiful Mind." Over the next twenty-four hours, the two had a series of tough conversations. "I love Harvey," Katzenberg told me, and yet he recalled a warning that he had given to Weinstein: "You can't work this way. You are endangering my friendship, and you must apologize to Stacey." Today, Weinstein is contrite. "I yelled, perhaps too loudly," he said. He eventually telephoned Snider to apologize, and he later apologized to Diller, too.

"It's time to be a statesman," Snider told Weinstein when they talked; she appealed to his vanity, telling him that if

PHOTOGRAPH BY RICHARD AVEDON

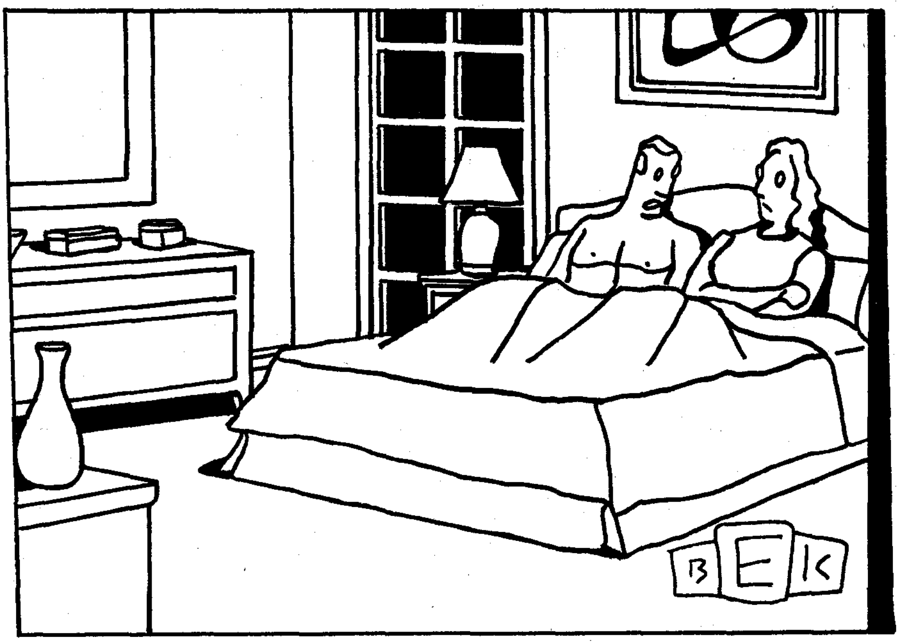
Weinstein in New York, November 19, 2002. "Let me translate brutality in the movie industry," he says. "Honesty."

he ever wanted to win the Academy's Irving G. Thalberg Memorial Award—named after a widely admired studio pioneer—he would have to change. Weinstein was chastened. "This year, I decided to take Stacey's advice," he told me during one of several conversations we had in his Tribeca office. "I'm going to go out of my way. It's like Ariel Sharon—you can't be a lion of the desert and then not govern properly. At a certain point, it's time for the fire-bombing to be over. You've got to know when the revolution has succeeded. Why do I have to keep fighting?"

Yet something propels him, as the director Julie Taymor discovered in March, two months after the Golden Globes party. Taymor, who created "The Lion King" for Disney on Broadway, directed "Frida" for Miramax. The film, which opened this fall to mixed reviews, is about the free-spirited Mexican painter Frida Kahlo and her marriage to Diego Rivera.

Last spring, when Weinstein saw "Frida," he decided that the pace was too slow and that the film was sometimes confusing. After a test screening at an Upper West Side theatre in March, Pauline Sealey-Kitazato, Miramax's director of market research, reported that the test audience liked the film but agreed with Weinstein. Taymor dismissed the complaints. Weinstein, standing in front of the theatre's popcorn counter and holding the questionnaire results in one hand, seemed briefly out of control. "You are the most arrogant person I have ever met," he said, ripping up the test results and dropping the scraps in front of Taymor, her collaborator and partner, Elliot Goldenthal, and other members of their production team. "I'm going to sell this to HBO," he said—meaning that he wouldn't release the movie in theatres, or that he might release it in theatres but skimp on marketing and yank it from circulation. The point was clear: this was Taymor's movie in name only. Weinstein walked away.

A moment later, Weinstein reappeared; he saw Taymor's agent, Bart Walker, of I.C.M., and yelled at him, "Get the fuck out of here!" To Goldenthal, who wrote the score for "Frida," Weinstein said, "I don't like the look on your face." Then, according to several witnesses, he moved very close to Goldenthal and said, "Why don't you defend her so I can beat the shit out of you?" Goldenthal quickly escorted Taymor away. When asked about this incident, Weinstein insisted that he did not threaten Goldenthal, yet he concedes, "I am not saying I was remotely hospitable. I did not behave well. I was not physically menacing to anybody. But I was rude and impolite." One member of Taymor's team described Weinstein's conduct as actually bordering on "criminal assault." Taymor thought of quitting or taking her name off the movie, fully expecting Miramax to abandon it—until, eventually, Weinstein called to say that he really loved the movie and wanted to work with her. Taymor stayed in the picture.



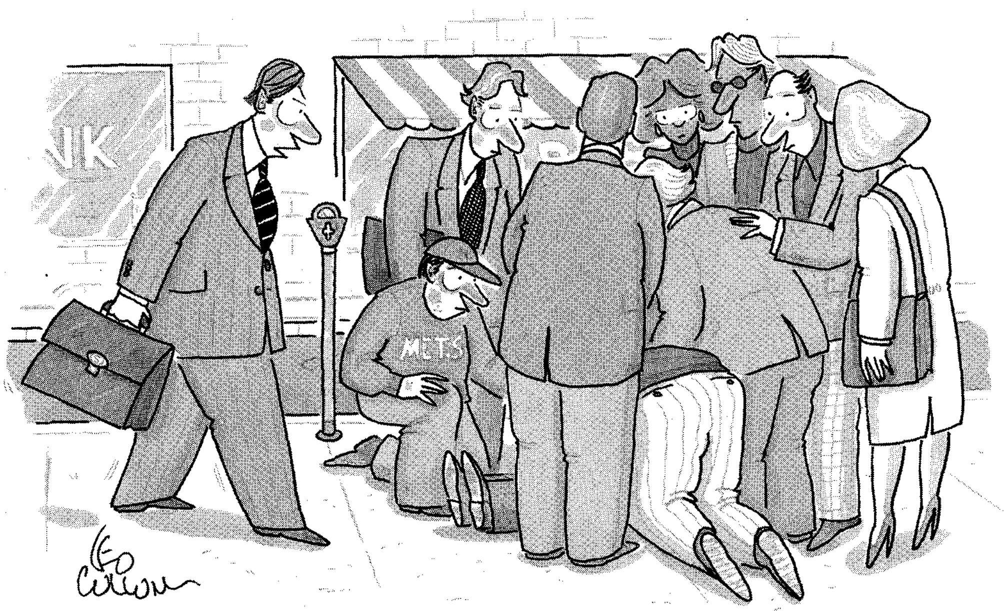
"I'm in this for the momentary haul."

After Weinstein's blowup with Stacey Snider, and his subsequent apology, he promised that he would change—that he'd be more collegial and, several people say, consider attending anger-management classes. He says that after his exchange with Julie Taymor he promised that if he had another tantrum he would give a hundred thousand dollars to Paul Newman's Hole in the Wall Gang camp for seriously ill children. Weinstein told me that his temper is "the thing I hate most about myself."

Harvey Weinstein believes that these flareups are simply the manifestations of a passion for movies, and, at fifty, he sees himself in the tradition of such studio greats as Thalberg and David O. Selznick. He believes that the heads of the other major studios are even more intrusive than he is, and he says, "They do it to make the movie commercial. I do it to protect the artistic integrity of an idea, and to help it be commercial. There should be creative tension. That's why I like David O. Selznick, not Harry Cohn. Cohn had no fucking taste."

Cohn's crude, abusive behavior to just about everyone is legendary. Cohn's funeral, in 1958, was crowded, and Red Skelton supposedly remarked, "Well, it only proves what they always say—give the public something they want to see, and they'll come out for it." Cohn, like Weinstein, believed that conflict produced superior work, and he made some fine movies: "It Happened One Night," "All the King's Men," "Born Yesterday," and "The Caine Mutiny," among others. Yet Weinstein, unlike Cohn, reads the scripts and books that Miramax buys, and in that way is closer to Selznick, who envisioned how "Gone with the Wind" could be brought to the screen. When I mentioned Cohn, Weinstein was not pleased. He looked down at his pack of Carltons. The top was ripped off so that he could more quickly grab a cigarette; he smokes several packs daily. He took a swig from a Diet Coke; one of his four aides always has a can ready before he sits down anywhere. Finally, he looked up and said, "Harry Cohn—that's the worst thing you could say to me. I don't think any filmmaker I've worked with, maybe with the exception of Jim Ivory"—the director James Ivory, of the Merchant-Ivory partnership—"would say that. I'm making 'Trainspotting,' 'Pulp Fiction.' I'm making calls on some of the most controversial material ever done in the movies. That's not the province of a businessman like Harry Cohn." Weinstein looked genuinely hurt.

A former employee who has thought about this comparison asks, "How can someone so crass make such good movies?" One Hollywood figure, who asked to remain unnamed, has a quick answer: "Beauty and the Beast." The producer and talent manager Bernie Brillstein said, "Passion means that you're willing to take a chance on something that's not formulaic, that you believe in the picture, not the grosses. In the long run, we'll remember the movies"—not the bullying. On the other hand, Brillstein has no business dealings with Weinstein.



"Please! Let me through. I don't have time to go around."

In part because of the bullying, Weinstein appears to have unleashed the sort of hostility and distaste that undid the once powerful talent agent Michael Ovitz. A recurring opinion is that Weinstein's behavior has got worse as his power has grown, and that as his power has grown he has abused it—much the way studio founders like Cohn did. One Hollywood executive said that Weinstein "is on the same trajectory" as Ovitz, and added that, like Ovitz, he "has lost the ability to see things clearly," that his ego has intruded. Several senior agents at the three largest Hollywood agencies—William Morris, C.A.A., and I.C.M.—told me that they were trying to steer business away from Miramax. Graydon Carter, the editor of *Vanity Fair*, which charts the ebb and flow of power in Hollywood, observed, "In so many conversations in Hollywood, at some point Harvey's name comes up, and not always in a good way."

Weinstein, however, compares himself to Spartacus battling the Roman Empire of Hollywood—as if, apart from his occasional ill-tempered outbursts, nothing had changed. "Let me translate brutality in the movie industry: honesty," he told me. "They say it's brutal. Yeah, it's brutal to tell the truth in an industry where everyone lies."

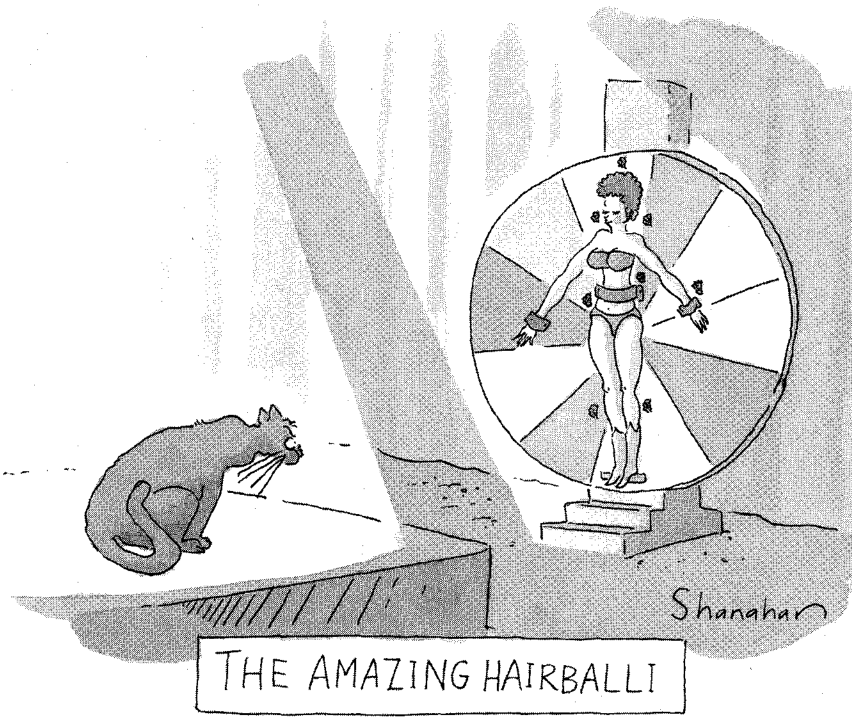
II

On most days, Weinstein arrives at Miramax's office, on Greenwich Street, in Tribeca, before 10 A.M. He's driven in a black Mercedes, which has four phones and visors that flip down to become small movie screens; associates refer to the car as the Batmobile. His four assistants occupy his outer office, and one of them usually travels with him and keeps him in cell-phone contact with the world. Weinstein's office, which his wife recently remodelled, has exposed-brick walls, and everything in it seems too small for the large man who occupies it. The biggest object is a framed poster for "Nevada Smith," featuring Steve McQueen. There is no computer, because Weinstein barely knows how to use one; an adjoining room has exercise equipment, but he rarely uses it.

One day in mid-July, at Miramax's offices, Weinstein met with a dozen or so of his executives to discuss which movies to enter in the various film festivals. These events—including Sundance, in January; Cannes, in May; Venice, in August; and New York and Toronto, in September—are useful in creating favorable publicity for upcoming releases, and can also serve as early-warning systems for films in trouble.

The meeting was held in a modestly furnished, cramped conference room down the hall from Weinstein's office. On this hot day, Weinstein wore what is more or less his standard outfit: gray suit pants, a dark-gray wool three-quarter-sleeve shirt, and red suspenders. He was told that the New York festival had turned down "The Hours," a film based on Michael Cunningham's Pulitzer Prize-winning novel about Virginia Woolf. Weinstein lit a cigarette and reacted stoically to the news. "This is a worry," he said. "That movie needs help"—from critics and film festivals. He was much less stoic when he was told that the New York festival had also said no to "City of God," Miramax's film about Brazilian ghetto life. "You're kidding," Weinstein said. "This is one of the best films we ever made. It's in Portuguese. They're morons!"

Weinstein sat at the end of the conference table, perched on the edge of an Aeron chair, and pounded the carpet with his right heel. He lit another cigarette, inhaling deeply as the executives ran through several more subjects. Cynthia M. Swartz, who was first hired by the company in 1989 to work in publicity and to supervise Miramax's Oscar campaigns—sending videocassettes of its contenders to the fifty-five hundred Academy voters, scheduling regular



screenings and running newspaper ads—turned the conversation to the Toronto festival. DreamWorks, she said, was considering a "huge retrospective for Spielberg," and she wanted to know whether she should counter with an effort to celebrate Martin Scorsese, the director of the Miramax epic "Gangs of New York," which is to be released this month.

"Leave it," Weinstein said. "I thought 'Minority Report' "—a Spielberg film—"was the best movie I saw this summer." He wanted to talk about Venice. "Should we play 'The Hours' in Venice or wait for the Berlin festival?" he asked, lighting another cigarette. One problem, he said, was that he hadn't yet seen "The Hours," because its producer, Scott Rudin, wouldn't screen it for him, and Weinstein wouldn't commit himself to showing it in Venice until he had. "Why don't we put our foot down on this," Weinstein said, referring to the standoff with Rudin. "Tell him, 'Harvey doesn't want to go to Venice.' It's good to scare them. Find out when he has to deliver the print to us." (Rudin insists that Weinstein "had already seen the film once in London, and had professed to like it a great deal.")

Weinstein had suggestions about "Frida": Why not create a museum tour to display Frida Kahlo's paintings? Why not do screenings for Latino audiences? Do a U.K. screening to create some buzz? He asked about "Tadpole," a comedy about a teen-ager's affair with an older woman, which he'd bought at Sundance. Miramax's chief publicist, Amanda Lundberg, pointed out that "in real life" the two female stars of the movie—Sigourney Weaver and Bebe Neuwirth—were married to or dating younger men. "Get that in the columns!" Weinstein said.

"We did," Matthew Hiltzik, Miramax's senior vice-president for corporate communications, said.

"We have to make it seem like there's a trend of older women married to or dating younger men," Weinstein said.

"*New York* magazine has a cover line"—on the purported trend—"in next week's issue," Hiltzik replied.

That didn't satisfy Weinstein, who wondered why the story couldn't get the entire cover. The group then reviewed the press promotion events planned for "Tadpole," and by the time Weinstein lit his fifth cigarette he was reviewing, word by word, a draft of an advertisement for the film.

One afternoon in August at Miramax's headquarters, Weinstein walked downstairs from his office to a small screening room to see "The Hours." He sat in the middle of the theatre. The seat to his left was taken by Scott Martin, the head of post-production for Miramax, who has spiked hair and wears three small silver hoops in his left ear. Martin, who is thirty-seven, joined the company eleven years ago and always sits next to Weinstein at screenings, because, Weinstein says, their tastes are similar. About two dozen other Miramax employees joined them.

"The Hours," directed by Stephen Daldry, with a screenplay by David Hare, stars Nicole Kidman, Meryl Streep, and Julianne Moore. It begins with Kidman, who plays Virginia Woolf, walking suicidally into a river. Weinstein and Martin, whispering together, instantly agreed that the Philip Glass score—in particular, the loud, thumping opening music—was too melodramatic, and that the film's pacing was too slow. After the movie ended, Weinstein stepped outside the screening room and told me that he liked the movie a lot, but didn't think it was ready to be shown at the Venice festival, later that month. "I never believe in taking a movie to a festival unless you're one hundred per cent locked," he said. "This movie is only ninety per cent. Great director. Great music, but it's over the top. Great acting."

Weinstein believes that some things in a movie can't be fixed—a bad performance, a mediocre screenplay—but that it's possible to do a lot with editing and music. Yet he seemed troubled by having to decide whether or not to show the film at Venice, although it is hard to resist the thought that he enjoys tormenting Scott Rudin, whom he detests. "Do I be the good Harvey or the bad Harvey?" he asked. "Do I argue to fix the movie? Do I argue that the scene where Virginia Woolf is kissing her sister is too long?" He knew that Rudin had to make the final call, but, since Miramax had international-distribution rights, Weinstein got to decide about Venice. Later, I was told, he poked his head inside the screening room and asked, "What's the consensus?" The small Miramax audience replied that the movie was very good, but not yet ready.

Rudin, like Weinstein, has made many good movies; and, like Weinstein, he has a reputation as a bully. He once sent a memorandum to Allison Jackson, who was in charge of special projects at Paramount, and who arranged the première of his film "The Truman Show," saying, "Be aware that the only thing separating my hands from your neck is the fact that there are three thousand miles between us." Copies of this note were sent to all of Jackson's superiors. When Rudin was told about Weinstein's decision on the Venice festival, he was, predictably, furious. "The Hours," he insisted, would open without change on December 27th.

Rudin also felt proprietary about the Philip Glass score. I had met with him several weeks earlier, and he asked me to sit in the control room while he reviewed the opening scene with Daldry; he was telling Daldry that the music needed to be more dramatic. (Later, Rudin said that if Weinstein "had said he wanted three changes in the music and talked to me about it, I would have made changes. If someone doesn't treat you as a partner, you don't behave as a partner.")

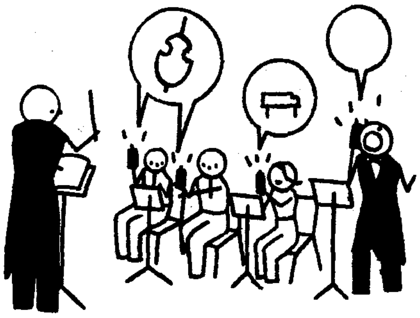
After "The Hours" was screened for an audience in Los Angeles on August 19th, Weinstein, bypassing Rudin, wrote directly to Sherry Lansing, the head of Paramount, which financed the film with Miramax: "I received the scores for last night's screening of 'The Hours' and I was very disappointed, as I am sure you were. I definitely think that not going to Venice was the best decision. . . . We can have a great movie, but the music hurts. The music is so overused, repetitive, intrusive, schmaltzy and too telegraphic. Additionally, I share your concerns about finding the right cuts and the right text to make the ending more satisfying." Ultimately, Rudin made some of the music and tempo changes that Weinstein wanted; Todd Haynes's "Far from Heaven" filled the slot at Venice that "The Hours" would have occupied. Later, Rudin said, in reference to Weinstein, "He has never been willing to discuss anything with me related to the finishing of this film."

The fight between Weinstein and Rudin was more than a battle of egos; even Weinstein's detractors say that he has a superb eye for movies and their promotion. Bingham Ray, the president of United Artists, who has been working with independent films for twenty years, isn't fond of Weinstein, but he said, "The thing I respect the most about Harvey is that he has real passion for film and great knowledge." Stacey Snider said, "Often, I have seen him do something because he believes in it, not because he's handicapping success. Look at the movies he picks."

These movies—some produced by Miramax, many bought for distribution—include Quentin Tarantino's "Pulp Fiction," Jane Campion's "The Piano," Jim Sheridan's "My Left Foot," Neil Jordan's "The Crying Game," Krzysztof Kieslowski's "Blue," "White," and "Red" trilogy, Kaige Chen's "Farewell My Concubine," Giuseppe Tornatore's "Cinema Paradiso," Michael Radford's "Il Postino," Alfonso Arau's "Like Water for Chocolate," Iain Softley's "The Wings of the Dove," Roberto Benigni's "Life Is Beautiful," Stephen Frears's "The Grifters," Anthony Minghella's "The English Patient," and John Madden's "Shakespeare in Love." "This is a guy who longs to be in the business he's in, who understands it at almost perfect pitch, and is gregariously talented," Barry Diller said.

Weinstein has been mocked for zealously promoting charming but slight movies as if they were "Citizen Kane," as he did in an unsuccessful campaign to get an Oscar for "Chocolat," in 2000. But any director or actor who has made a movie that received little support or was quickly pulled from theatres—a film like Disney's "Rushmore" or Paramount's "Election"—appreciates that level of commitment. To Anthony Minghella, who has directed three Miramax movies, Weinstein "is a bull. And a bull that, when he's charging alongside you, can be an exhilarating presence in your life. If he's charging toward you, then it's a big force to negotiate."

Yet Weinstein's involvement often goes beyond support, right to the aesthetic heart of a movie, as Martin Scorsese learned while making "Gangs of New York," which is based on Herbert Asbury's 1927 book about clashes between immigrants on the streets of nineteenth-century Manhattan. When Miramax agreed, in 2000, to back the movie, Weinstein told Scorsese to fire the screenwriter Jay Cocks, Scorsese's collaborator and best friend, who had worked on the project through more than a dozen drafts in the course of two decades. Scorsese did it, gently telling his friend that their work together was over—otherwise, Weinstein wouldn't support the movie. Cocks understood. After filming began, in September of 2000, Weinstein spent sixteen weeks on the set in Rome. He and Scorsese tried to muffle stories that they were feuding, and at one point they issued a statement about their "terrific working relationship" and how much "fun" they'd had, but for the most part the relationship was neither terrific nor fun. Scorsese's friends say that he was miserable working with Weinstein. The one friend who will say this for the record, Jay Cocks, describes it as an "awful" experience—except that, in Cocks's view, "the movie turned out so well."



I met with Scorsese recently in the small screening room of his Park Avenue office, and he praised Weinstein for being "ruthlessly honest," for his "enthusiasm," and for his ability to get things done and to manage costs. Still, Scorsese says that the description of the movie set as "fun" was "a euphemism" to "psych myself" and the actors and crew; of Weinstein he said, "I found Harvey really imposing on me." Scorsese admits that he's not the easiest person to work with. "I have to be told stuff—only I don't like to be told anything," he says. "I took two of his nine ideas. I kept telling him he should direct. He's all over the product, the grammar." With Weinstein's prodding, "Gangs," which was originally supposed to be released a year ago, was shortened from more than three hours to about two and a half.

By this fall, the Hollywood gossip was that Miramax might suffer huge losses on "Gangs," but Weinstein denies this. He says that Miramax's financial risk has been minimized: foreign rights were sold for sixty-eight million dollars; Disney's Touchstone Pictures picked up half of Miramax's thirty-two-million-dollar commitment; and when the movie went over budget Bob Weinstein induced Scorsese and one of the stars, Leonardo DiCaprio, to defer more than six million dollars in salary for a bigger share of the profits. Assuming domestic marketing costs of thirty-five million dollars, and revenues from video rentals and sales, as well as television sales, Weinstein says, "I break even if the movie grosses fifty-five million dollars" in the United States. But many in Hollywood believe that the production cost of "Gangs" was closer to a hundred and twenty million dollars (Weinstein disputes this), so Miramax would lose money unless the movie grosses closer to a hundred million dollars at the box office.

Studio executives have always reviewed copies of daily footage, which gives them some idea of how a movie is unfolding, but in the past films were edited only in a cutting room, with the editor and the director laboriously cutting and splicing actual film. Today, using an Avid video-editing machine, a studio can easily create alternative versions of a film. At Miramax, Scott Martin supervises a team of three people who prepare post-production prints of each film and sometimes produce, under Weinstein's direction, an edited version of the film; when there are differences between the director and Miramax, Weinstein often shows the Miramax version to the director. The potential for creative tension is obvious: what if Weinstein had cut his own version of "Gangs" and tested it alongside Scorsese's? Although Weinstein says he's never shown his own cut version of a film without the director's approval, filmmakers complain he has done just that with several films, including "The Shipping News," which was released last year. Sometimes Weinstein leans on directors to the point where a film is drastically altered. Often, his instincts are right; this year, Miramax released the director's cut of "Cinema Paradiso," with fifty-one minutes restored. Most critics preferred the earlier, shorter film, which won an Oscar in the foreign-film category.

Because Weinstein immerses himself so deeply in the work of filmmakers, he's been called Harvey Scissorhands. In the case of "Frida," Weinstein's team made thirty-three cuts, totalling nine and a half minutes. The cuts sound more Draconian than they appear; to an untrained eye, they might be barely noticeable—twenty-eight seconds pared from a shopping scene, eighty-one seconds from a cocktail party. "I'm not cutting for fun," Weinstein said one day in his office. "I'm cutting for the shit to work. All my life I served one master: the film. I love movies." Julie Taymor described the process differently. "When he's in an editing room and he's in a good mood, we can work together," she said of Weinstein. And when he's in a bad mood? "I'm not going there," she replied. "Harvey feels conflict is necessary to get results. I don't. I think if people are open and coöperate you get there faster." In the end, Weinstein left the final edit of "Frida" to Taymor, who made cuts and clarifications totalling almost two minutes, which was still less than Weinstein had wanted.

One day when I stopped by Miramax's office, I found Weinstein doing one of the things he loves most: editing a film. In this case, it was a film directed by Scott Spiegel. The film, "My Name Is Modesty," was based on the exploits of the comic-book character Modesty Blaise. As Weinstein watched a tape, a production executive took notes. After a few minutes, he said, "There's another way to begin the movie, which is here in the casino." Cut, cut, cut, he told her. "Less is more. This whole scene can be played faster. You're dying here. Cut the guards out here." After speeding through the nearly two-hour tape in forty minutes, Weinstein told the executive, "You get the idea." Weinstein had a satisfied look; his editing ideas made sense. Still, the director was not present. When I asked about that, he said, "Of course, these changes are subject to the director's approval."

Weinstein tries to bring an auteur's knowledge to his work—and this, he says, is something people don't know about him. "I am a perpetual student," he said. "And I can tell you that the most enriching thing that happened to me with Marty Scorsese is that, when making 'Gangs of New York,' Marty would give me a movie to watch every Saturday night, a movie that influenced him in the making of the movie. So over three years I saw eighty films that Scorsese gave me. I wanted to call it 'Saturday Nights with Marty,' because I would see David Lean, 'Oliver Twist,' from his own library. Here I am, twenty-two years, whatever, into the business, and I am learning more than I ever learned on any movie, from Marty." This is Harvey the cinéaste, and he insists that it distinguishes him from his Hollywood peers. "If you asked people in the industry, 'Name me five François Truffaut movies,' I don't think ninety per cent of them could even tell you," he said. "Nor do they care. Which also bothers me. I see myself as an outsider."

III

Max Weinstein, Harvey's father, saw himself as an outsider, too. During the Second World War, Max was an Army supply sergeant based in Cairo. After the war, he stayed in the Middle East to support the Jewish underground in Palestine. In 1950, after he returned to the United States, he married Miriam Postel, from Brooklyn. They lived in a first-floor apartment in a six-story rent-controlled, union-subsidized housing development in Flushing, Queens. Their sons were born two years apart—Harvey in 1952 and Bob in 1954. The boys argued constantly, but were reminded by their father that their models should be the Kennedy brothers, who above all were loyal to each other. Harvey was big and burly; Bob was somewhat shorter and thinner.

Max was a diamond cutter in a booth on Forty-seventh Street, in Manhattan's diamond district. It was lonely work, but when the jewelry business was good the whole family vacationed in the Catskills. When it was bad, Miriam got a job as a secretary and the boys were sent off to their grandmother's bungalow upstate for the summer.

When Harvey was fourteen and Bob twelve, Harvey had what he considers an epiphany. At the time, he says, "we'd seen every movie in the neighborhood—all the spear, sword, and sandal movies." But one day, Weinstein recalls, "we read that a movie called 'The 400 Blows' is playing at the Mayfair movie theatre—it's Truffaut, but we don't know this at the time. And we think, O.K., here it is—you know, sex movie, 'The 400 Blows.' We walked two miles to this theatre.

"We go with six friends. And this black-and-white movie starts; and at the end of it the only ones left are me and Bob, because my friends say, 'This sucks. This is shit, this isn't what we were supposed to see. Harvey, you're an idiot.' And I said, I don't know, the title sounded good, we just wanted to see, like, you know, a sexy movie. . . . I didn't know that you could make movies like that. I thought all movies were 'Hercules' and James Bond and 'The Ten Commandments,' so instead here's the Mayfair movie theatre, and the Mayfair movie theatre is paradise—that's why 'Cinema Paradiso' is an iconic movie for the company. So this theatre became incredible. Every week. Anytime I could go. I couldn't believe these movies. Fellini. Visconti. I mean, my eyes were falling out of my head."

On Saturdays, Max Weinstein often accompanied his sons to the movies, giving Harvey and Bob a sense that it was O.K. to skip the playground and to get involved in creative activities—to see films with subtitles. "Max encouraged them to be individuals," a family friend says. Weinstein said, "He loved movies, but, you know, he worked hard, my dad. And so he would sleep in the theatre, and we would watch the movie. Especially the foreign-language movies. But I do remember seeing a seminal movie with him years later, when we were in college. I saw 'Amarcord' and I took my dad to see it, and he flipped out. It was his favorite movie, he said—a Fellini movie!"

Harvey and Bob were smart enough to skip a grade, but they didn't much like school. In 1969—a year when Max Weinstein supported Norman Mailer for mayor against John Lindsay—Harvey enrolled at a college the family could afford, the State University of New York at Buffalo; two years later, Bob entered SUNY at Fredonia, also in western New York. Harvey says he chose Buffalo because, unlike most state-college towns, it was a big city with more than one movie theatre. He quickly revealed his knack for promoting talent. As a member of an arts council, he worked on bringing concerts to Buffalo. Soon, he was having run-ins with a similar group. A student named Beryl Handler, who was a member of the rival group, remembers, "There was a lot of resistance, because he wasn't popular, because he would try and bully his way into concert situations." Weinstein says that the council was unimaginative. In any case, he was determined to produce concerts, and soon after he left the organization he and a classmate named Corky Burger flew to New York and persuaded Stephen Stills to perform in Buffalo. With that event, and twenty thousand dollars that Weinstein raised, a concert company was born: Harvey & Corky Presents.

Weinstein lived in an off-campus house with Eugene Fahey and Dennis Ward, two classmates from Buffalo who were political activists. They got Weinstein to join them in opposing the Vietnam War and in supporting George McGovern against Richard Nixon. Today, Fahey is a State Supreme Court judge; Ward is a lawyer and the secretary of the Erie County Democratic Party. The three stay in close touch, and their families get together every Fourth of July at the Weinsteins' house on Martha's Vineyard. In New York in late September, I met with the three college friends and asked Fahey and Ward to describe Weinstein as he was then. Fahey remembered Weinstein crashing into opponents in pickup football games. "Even when a block wasn't necessary, sometimes he'd block," Fahey said, smiling. "There's no such thing as touch football with Harvey."

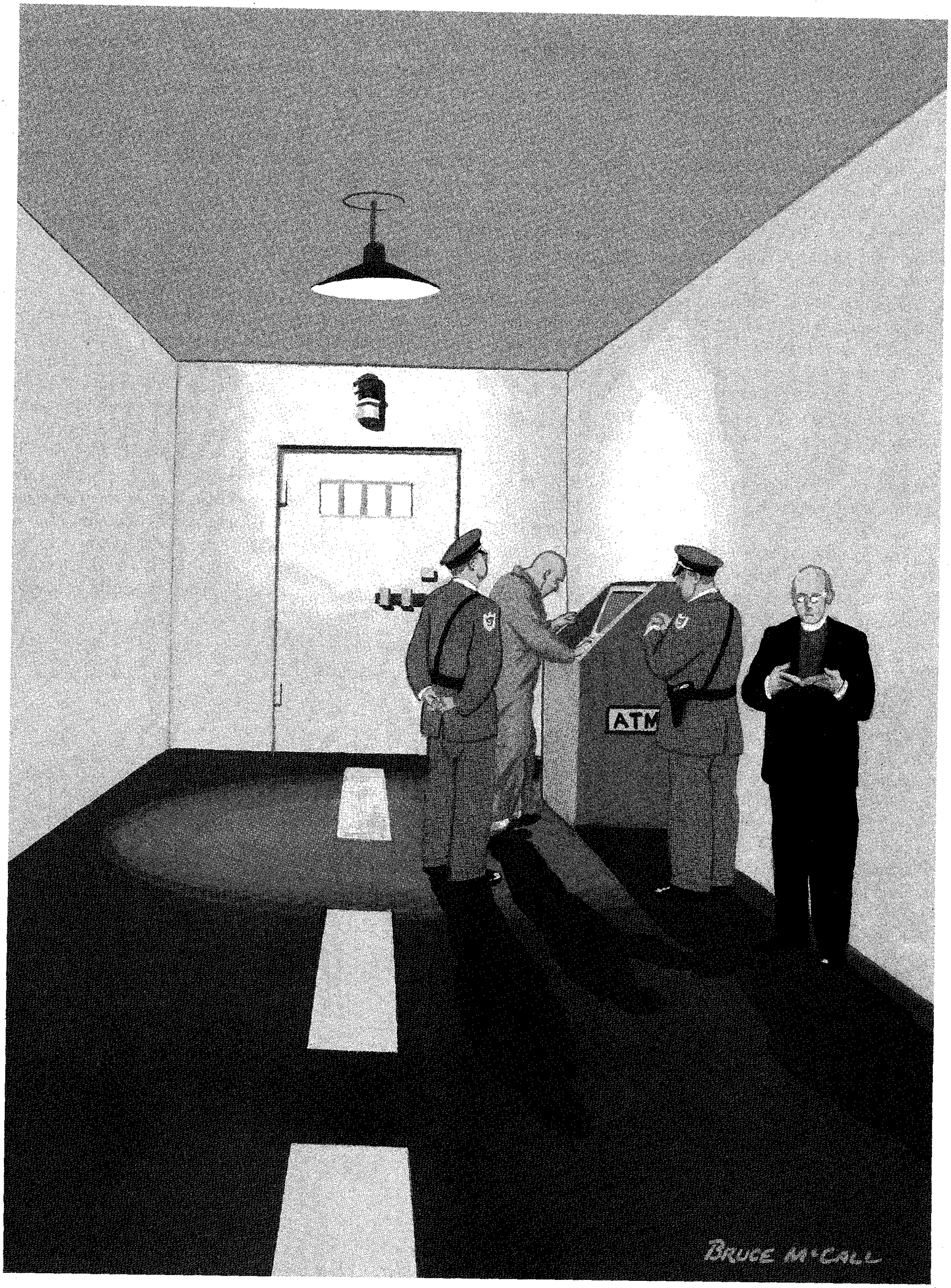
Weinstein interrupted to say, "But I think we should remember who we were picking on. I was stupid enough to challenge the football team! Were we tough? Yeah. But who did we pick on?" It was a description that might have fit his skirmishes with Hollywood.

In 1973, both Harvey and Bob dropped out of college, Harvey as a senior and Bob as a sophomore. Bob moved into a new house that Harvey, Fahey, and Ward rented, and went to work for Harvey & Corky Presents. Right away, the company acquired a rundown two-thousand-seat theatre in Buffalo, called the Century, and scheduled concerts. Bob Weinstein came up with the idea of showing three movies for the price of one on Saturday nights. "He had a formula," Harvey recalls. "At eight o'clock, he'd show a good movie," and then two less well-known films.

In 1976, Max Weinstein died suddenly, of a heart attack, at the age of fifty-two. "He was a gentler version of Harvey," said Gene Fahey, who met Max in Buffalo, where he paid regular visits to his sons. Max had had some business and health setbacks; cataracts had made it difficult to cut diamonds. He was still going to Forty-seventh Street, but he no longer owned a booth. What made Harvey and Bob especially sad, someone who knows them intimately says, was that they "wanted to make Max proud," and they never had a chance to do it. Harvey, who

"For the full effect, it's best worn in front of a throng."

THE LAST WORD IN CONVENIENCE BY BRUCE McCALL


ATM
BRUCE McCALL

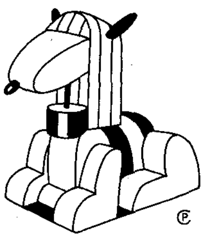
was twenty-four when Max died, still finds it difficult to talk about his father. When he does, a family friend says, "he talks with reverence."

By the late seventies, Harvey was a Buffalo homeowner and Bob was married to a local hairdresser. They wanted to learn the movie business, and Harvey volunteered to commute to New York City and work part time as an assistant to Julian Schlossberg, who was the vice-president of East Coast production for Paramount. Schlossberg also ran a lecture series at Town Hall on the business, and one night in 1976 Harvey and Bob went to hear Arthur Manson, who was at that time the Warner Bros. vice-president for worldwide advertising and publicity. Manson spoke about the growing importance of marketing and research; just as vital, he said, was boldness. He explained how he had helped market "Willard"—the rat horror movie—and how the ads that had rats in them drew much bigger audiences than the ads that didn't. Then, there were movies, such as "Walking Tall," that succeeded because the studio waited for word of mouth to build. Twenty-six years later, Harvey's memory of Manson's speech is still vivid. "Arthur said something I never forgot: you could position a movie by using advertising," Weinstein said. "I loved the idea that you could educate an audience for a more intelligent film. And sometimes you have to put the rat in the ad."

Harvey wanted to get out of concert promotion, so he sold his share in the business. In 1979, Harvey and Bob formed a company called Miramax, after their parents, Miriam and Max. Miriam Weinstein was the receptionist at their first office, at Forty-eighth Street and Madison Avenue; she regularly brought pastries to work, and still does, although she is no longer the receptionist. Arthur Manson was recruited as a marketing and distribution consultant, a position that he still holds.

Their timing couldn't have been better, for the studio business model was changing. In the late sixties and early seventies, studios had supported films by directors who were breaking new ground: Mike Nichols's "The Graduate," Robert Altman's "McCabe & Mrs. Miller," Stanley Kubrick's "A Clockwork Orange," Francis Ford Coppola's "The Godfather," and Scorsese's "Mean Streets," among others. As Peter Biskind, in his book on the era, "Easy Riders, Raging Bulls," put it, "It was the last time Hollywood produced a body of risky, high-quality work—as opposed to the errant masterpiece—work that was character-, rather than plot-driven, that defied traditional narrative conventions . . . that broke the taboos of language and behavior, that dared to end unhappily." Blockbuster films—Spielberg's "Jaws" and George Lucas's "Star Wars"—became the new template for mainstream success; and this left an opening for the kind of movies that had first impressed the teen-age Weinstein brothers.

"The easiest way to get into the business was in the art-film business," observes Tom Bernard, who was then an executive at UA Classics and is today the co-president of Sony Pictures Classics. "You could buy a small movie in Europe for fifty thousand dollars, and, if that hit, you bought more." That was the Weinsteins' idea, and although they were not then trying to build a production studio, when they tried to book their smaller films into theatres, the studios pushed them out. Exhibitors asserted that there was no audience for the movies they promoted. "We felt the coldness of that system," Weinstein said. "No one cared about the Spanish director or the Chinese movie." When the brothers made their first trip to Cannes, in the late seventies, they discovered that the Hollywood studios had booked almost every room at the Majestic Hotel; they ended up sharing a bed in a room the size of a closet.



The first Miramax releases included films that were not precisely "The 400 Blows," such as, in 1981, "Goodbye, Emmanuelle," an erotic film. At the 1981 Cannes festival, the brothers pursued Martin Lewis, who had helped produce an Amnesty International benefit featuring Eric Clapton and members of Monty Python, and who by then had given up trying to find an American distributor for a film of the gala. Lewis was happy to make a deal with Miramax, and in 1982 the company released the film, "The Secret Policeman's Other Ball."

Lewis, whose background was in public relations and marketing, knew the value of controversy. A commercial showed one of the Pythons in front of the American flag wearing a tutu and fishnet stockings and declaring that he spoke for "the Oral Majority" in objecting to the "lewd, lascivious" content of the film. Miramax submitted the commercial to several New York television stations, and they rejected it. Soon, the stations' censoring of the ad itself became news; "Saturday Night Live" built a sketch around it. The film was Miramax's first hit—and, for several years, its last. The brothers tried their hands at co-writing and directing a movie, "Playing for Keeps," about a group of rebellious high-school kids. The movie vanished quickly, and deserved to. With twenty employees, Miramax was barely alive.

Financial relief came in 1988, when a British venture-capital firm, seeing a relatively inexpensive way to get into the movie business, invested two and a half million dollars in Miramax in return for a small stake in the company. This investment allowed the brothers to open a twenty-five-million-dollar line of credit. "Up to then, it was hand to mouth," Weinstein recalled. "We didn't know if the paychecks were coming in." The money allowed them to co-produce foreign films as well as to buy them; one of the first that they produced was "Scandal," a film about the British Cabinet minister John Profumo's affair with a call girl. "Scandal" was shown on what for Miramax was a record number of screens—four hundred—and made a profit. Miramax's breakout film came a year later, in 1989: Steven Soderbergh's "Sex, Lies and Videotape," a study of a marriage coming apart in an era of sexual liberation, which starred Andie MacDowell and James Spader. The brothers had seen Soderbergh's film at Sundance, and Harvey credits Bob with recognizing its potential. They paid a million dollars for it, a hefty sum at the time. "They didn't even own the video rights," Soderbergh told me. "I was sort of wondering, Are these guys nuts?" Soderbergh says he chose the brothers over equal bids for two reasons: their passion for film and their public-relations savvy.

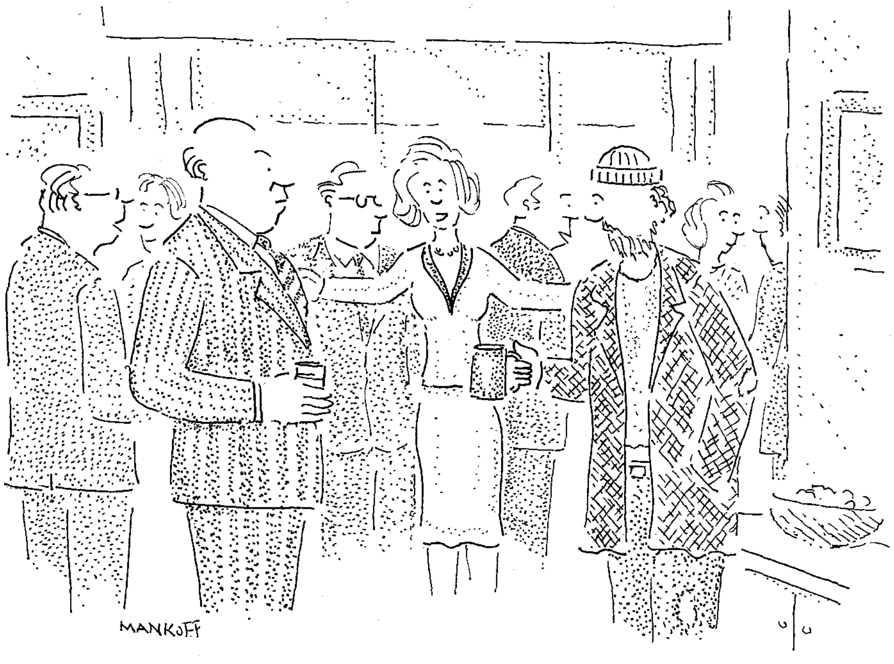
There were, to be sure, other important companies and divisions interested in independent cinema. Island Pictures released Spike Lee's "She's Gotta Have It" and "Kiss of the Spider Woman," which won an Oscar for William Hurt; Orion Classics was behind films by Louis Malle, Wim Wenders, Jim Jarmusch, and Akira Kurosawa. There was strong competition from New Line and Samuel Goldwyn. But by the late eighties only half a dozen independent films had grossed as much as five million dollars, according to a study commissioned by the Sundance Institute. And these movies rarely attracted the sort of attention captured by "Sex, Lies and Videotape," which won the Palme d'Or at Cannes and went on to gross twenty-five million dollars. The Weinsteins made two other shrewd acquisitions that year, which won Miramax some of its earliest Oscars: "Cinema Paradiso" and "My Left Foot," starring Daniel Day-Lewis, who won the best-actor award. Young agents began to steer talented clients to Miramax.

The Weinsteins' appreciation of the art of moviemaking was matched by their gift for salesmanship, and for a while Miramax was extremely successful. The company paid four million dollars for "The Crying Game," which the major studios had rejected, and fashioned a publicity campaign around an anatomical surprise in the movie. In the end, the movie, released in 1992, grossed sixty-three million dollars and was nominated for six Academy Awards (winning one). Miramax won thirty-six Oscars in the next ten years.

Success, however, did *not* make Miramax a pleasant place to work. An assistant hired in the early nineties to work in production lasted for only eight months. She recalls it as "terrifying," with female executives screaming and cursing like the Weinstein brothers. "I cried constantly," she said. Donna Gigliotti, a producer, worked there for three and a half years as an executive vice-president and had a desk on the other side of a wall from Harvey Weinstein's office. "I was sitting at my desk one day and thought we were hit by an earthquake," she said. "The wall just shook. I stood up. I learned that he had flung a marble ashtray at the wall." In 1993, *Fortune* included the Weinsteins on its list of America's Toughest Bosses.

IV

By the early nineties, Harvey and Bob wanted to do more than buy and distribute other people's movies; they wanted to produce more films of their own to compete with the major studios. But they didn't have the resources; for instance, when they tried to keep Jim Sheridan ("My Left Foot"), Universal offered Sheridan a three-million-dollar deal that Miramax couldn't match. "It broke my heart," Weinstein said. The Weinsteins decided that Miramax needed a rich corporate parent.



"Greedy, meet needy."

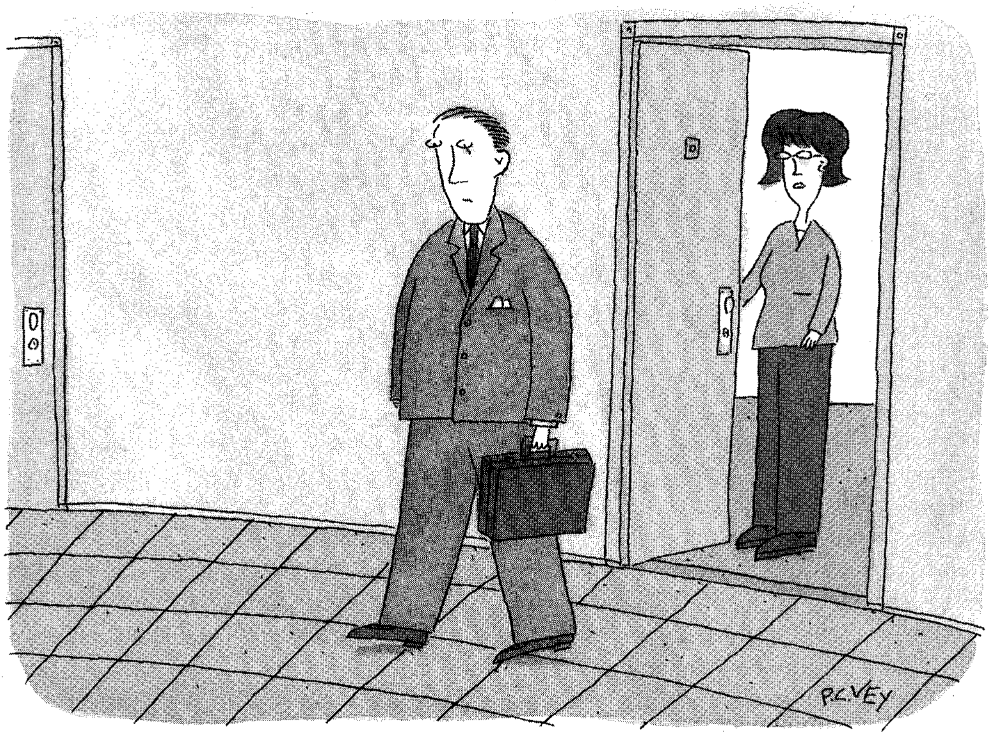
In the spring of 1993, the brothers sold Miramax to Disney, for between sixty and eighty million dollars (the higher figure if Miramax met certain financial thresholds). The family-friendly Disney and the quirky and independent Miramax were an odd match, but both parties got something. Miramax and the Weinsteins got financial security; Disney got the Miramax film library—which now includes approximately five hundred films. This gave Disney more weight in the rapidly expanding pay-cable and video markets. The major restrictions were that Miramax now needed Disney's corporate approval before it could invest more than twelve and a half (since raised to twenty) million dollars in a movie, and Miramax could not release an NC-17 or X-rated movie. Weinstein declared that he had no problem with the new guidelines, and press reports described a new, mellower Harvey.

Joe Roth, who succeeded Jeffrey Katzenberg as Disney's studio chief in 1994, did not encounter a new Harvey. Soon after he took over the studio, Roth flew East for lunch with the brothers at the Tribeca Grill. "I walked into the restaurant thinking I was going to help them," Roth recalled. "They were paranoid about me." The brothers were uncharacteristically quiet, eying Roth warily. Finally, Roth exclaimed, "Hey, wait a minute. I'm here as the head of the studio and I'm here to help you."

"What do you mean, 'help'?" Harvey asked.

Roth remembers thinking, What did I get into? He also saw something else that would rankle over the years: the Weinstein brothers no longer owned the company, but they still acted as if they did. Weinstein once told *Variety*, "Michael Eisner can't make me do anything."

Disney's money did permit Miramax to develop more movies. This turned out to be a mixed blessing: it supported the brothers' gift for picking good films, but it also invited them to make the kind of "popcorn" movies with big stars that they'd once disdained. Still, the next few years were good for Miramax. Harvey Weinstein spent eight million dollars to acquire and produce Quentin Tarantino's "Pulp Fiction," which won first prize at Cannes in 1994 and grossed more than a hundred million dollars in the United States—a first for an independent film. Tarantino



"Don't get caught."

told me, "Nobody else in town, even with the Palme d'Or, would have had the confidence to say, 'This is going to be a smash hit. We're going to open in the biggest number of theatres we can.' Warner Bros. and the other studios would have been scared of it."

Miramax also had more money to spend on nurturing talent. The director Kevin Smith, who was trying to win backing for his début film, "Clerks," at Sundance in 1994, was having no luck. " 'Clerks' screened well four times," Smith recalled, "and there wasn't a distributor lined up to see us at that fourth screening—except for Weinstein. He took us across the street to this restaurant and he had potato skins in one hand and a lit cigarette in the other and he was telling us how 'we're going to take the world by storm, and we're going to put a *fucking* soundtrack to this movie and we're going to take it out to *fucking* theatres and put it on *fucking* campuses.' And we're sitting there, like, 'Fuck yes! This is a dude we can get behind. A true vulgarian—with balls!' "

Disney money also permitted Bob Weinstein to launch Dimension Films, a division devoted to the revenue-producing horror- and teen-movie market. Bob succeeded brilliantly at making money for Dimension, even if he wasn't developing the kinds of distinctive films that Miramax had pledged to make.

Harvey Weinstein, as part of the larger, richer Miramax, appreciated his own power, and at the same time he denied that he had it. He tended to view Miramax and Hollywood in the old David vs. Goliath way. But Miramax, with the world's second-largest media company behind it, had long since become Goliath.

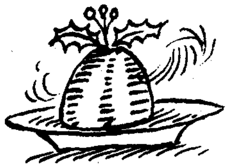
In the mid-nineties, Harvey Weinstein was still regarded as a colorful, shrewd character, perhaps because Miramax was backing movies that few others would, and because his outbursts were seen as mere tactics. His excesses, including altercations at film festivals—with Jonathan Taplin, the sales executive for "Shine," with Tom Bernard, the co-president of Sony Pictures Classics, with Bingham Ray, the president of United Artists—were somehow seen as extensions of his passion, his commitment to good films. Harvey Weinstein saw himself that way.

In 1997, Miramax released thirty-four films, which earned record-breaking revenues of four hundred and twenty million dollars, nearly half of which came from the Dimension division, with movies like "Scream" and "Scream 2." "The English Patient," in which Miramax invested about thirty million dollars, won nine Oscars. Joe Roth had approved the investment on the condition that Miramax sell the overseas-distribution rights.

During the making of "The English Patient," Weinstein fought over money with the film's producer, Saul Zaentz, and with the director, Anthony Minghella, and the crew, who were induced to defer part of their salary. The movie grossed more than sixty million dollars in the United States—almost half of which went to Miramax—yet Minghella and the crew still haven't been paid in full, and Zaentz says that he hasn't received his full share of the profits. (According to Weinstein, he has given Zaentz more than three million dollars, and Zaentz is the one who is contractually obligated to pay the cast and crew.) Weinstein says that what looks like a hit in the movie business often isn't—that, since Miramax spent an additional forty-two million dollars to market "The English Patient," the company actually lost money on it. But that does not describe the real bottom line, which in Hollywood is often impenetrable. To get Miramax's support, Zaentz gave the company worldwide rights to all broadcast, cable, pay-TV, home-video, and other ancillary theatrical revenues—which meant at least fifty million dollars more for Miramax and Disney. Weinstein, meanwhile, says that Miramax, in selling off the foreign rights, "made a mistake" and lost out on its share of the hundred-and-fifty-million-dollar overseas box-office.

"We're in the process of filing a lawsuit," Zaentz told me last summer. As of this month, he still hadn't done so, yet he called Weinstein "a liar" and said, "I can't wait to go to court." Although Weinstein insists that it is Zaentz who owes the money to Minghella and the crew, Minghella suggests that it is Weinstein's obligation. Minghella also said, "I believe that if I called Weinstein and asked for the money he would pay." Minghella is at present finishing his third Miramax movie, "Cold Mountain."

Weinstein may quarrel with producers and directors, but he pampers actors. "Harvey has a more old-fashioned approach to relationships with movie stars," Gwyneth Paltrow told me. "It's very sort of mafioso—'We're all in this together.' He looks out for me." Paltrow has made seven movies for Miramax since Weinstein cast her in "The Pallbearer," when she was twenty-two, and then in her first starring role, in "Emma." Even when she does a movie for another studio, he treats Paltrow, whom he calls "the First Lady of Miramax," like family and congratulates her on good reviews or box-office results. He cast Paltrow in "Shakespeare in Love," a Tom Stoppard script that had been owned for nearly a decade by Universal. Donna Gigliotti, who had a first-look production deal with Miramax in 1998, was enthusiastic about the script, as was Weinstein. He not only bought it but bet on a relatively inexperienced director, John Madden, because he was swept away by Madden's vision for the movie.



"When push comes to shove, the talent feel he's on their side," Joe Roth says. "It's almost an animal instinct." Minghella recalled how, during the filming of "Cold Mountain," in South Carolina, Jude Law's wife went into labor and the actor asked to fly home to England to be with her. Minghella was startled when Weinstein announced that he would send a plane to take Law to England, and agreed to pay the cast and crew for four days while they waited for Law to get back. "He demands loyalty, and he gives loyalty," Minghella said. Weinstein said that the decision to stop shooting cost Miramax $1.1 million. "Ask Jeffrey Katzenberg or Stacey Snider if they'd make the same decision!" he added.

In March of 1999, "Shakespeare in Love" won seven Academy Awards, including best picture—Miramax's second best-picture winner, after "The English Patient." In the process, Weinstein alienated Steven Spielberg. Although Spielberg won an Oscar for best director, his film, "Saving Private Ryan," was eclipsed by "Shakespeare." Spielberg "was furious at Harvey," said a movie executive who listened to his complaints, because he believed Weinstein leaked stories that harmed "Saving Private Ryan" with Academy voters. Weinstein denies it, claiming that he has never leaked any story.

In fact, either directly or through Miramax employees, Weinstein shovels clippings, correspondence, and gossip to reporters. He courts gossip columnists with screenings and openings and lunches. The *Post's* Cindy Adams says, with affection, "He's always available for a quote, whether you want one or not." Weinstein got Richard Johnson, the editor of the *Post's* Page Six, to write a script for a movie, "Jet Set." The project stalled, and Johnson says, "I didn't get a penny." Roger Friedman, who later joined Foxnews.com, signed a deal to produce and narrate a Miramax music documentary. When Weinstein learned that Ian Spiegelman, who had been a gossip columnist at the *Post* and at *New York,* had a collection of short stories, Weinstein urged Miramax's publishing house to bring them out. His editors said no. (Villard plans to publish another project, a novel, next year.) In 1999, Weinstein succeeded in persuading the publishing house to give a book contract to John Connolly, a *Premiere* contributor who had been working on a piece about Miramax. During the 2000 Presidential election, Weinstein met with Al Gore's daughter Karenna, two witnesses recall, and advised her, "The most important thing is the gossip columnists. The New York *Times* gets its news from them."

Weinstein doesn't hesitate to go over the heads of reporters who write about him. Last year, when David Carr was doing a profile of him for *New York,* he repeatedly got in touch with executives at Primedia, the magazine's owner, and with Caroline Miller, the editor, hoping to tone the piece down. He tries to treat profiles, including this one, as if they were a Miramax movie and he were the producer. Long before a Miramax movie opens, Weinstein cultivates writers; he invites movie buffs, editors, and Hollywood reporters—among them Janet Maslin, the former chief movie critic of the *Times;* the freelancer Holly Millea, formerly of *Premiere;* Lynn Hirschberg, of the *Times Magazine;* Guy Flatley, formerly of *Cosmopolitan* and the *Times;* Peter Herbst, the editor of *Premiere;* and Graham Fuller, of *Interview*—to individually screen the movie and tell him what they think. They don't get paid, but they enjoy proximity to a powerful figure who happens to know as much about movies as they do, or more.

V

As the nineties ended, everything seemed right with Harvey Weinstein's world. In 1987, he had married a Miramax employee, Eve Chilton, who comes from a socially prominent Massachusetts family. (Harvey and Eve have three young children.) At Miramax and Dimension, profits kept rising; a stable of talented actors and directors were making Miramax films—among them Gwyneth Paltrow, Ben Affleck, Matt Damon, Anthony Minghella, John Madden, and Lasse Hallström. Weinstein had given generously to the Democratic Party and to President Clinton, who counts himself a friend; he spent a weekend at Camp David. "Among Harvey's many endearing qualities is that he's never forgotten that he was once a middle-class kid from Queens," the investor Steven Rattner, a friend and Martha's Vineyard neighbor, says. "So he pinches himself every time he's invited to the White House or when he realizes he can call the President on the phone." Rattner remembers that, during the visit to Camp David, Weinstein, who was hungry for two days because he couldn't stand the processed-ham sandwiches in the Navy mess, called Jeffrey Katzenberg for advice. Katzenberg told him about a Wendy's nearby, and Weinstein directed a Navy driver to take him there. When I asked Clinton about Weinstein's sometimes compulsive behavior, the former President said, "Something happens to you when you're a child and makes you feel that if you really want to have an impact in life you have to be in a hurry. And you can't be a milquetoast. And I don't know much about his life before he got involved with politics, but there's something there that planted a deep yearning in him that would let him define the work of his life, at least in part, by how much he got done how quick. And I think that guys like him—and me—if you're not careful you miss a lot of the other things in life."

In the summer of 1998, Weinstein lured Tina Brown, then the editor of *The New Yorker*, to start a new magazine, which would be called *Talk*. "I always thought it would be cool to have a magazine," Weinstein said. "I'm a magazine and book junkie. I don't know that Harry Cohn read magazines! I thought Tina was the best editor in America." He believed that the magazine could promote his movies and that his movie stars would pose for the covers of the magazine and that writers for *Talk* would generate movie ideas—it would be a model of synergy. He neglected to tell Michael Eisner about this venture, however, and the Disney C.E.O. was angry. "Michael definitely didn't want me to do it," Weinstein says. At the time, Disney was selling off its magazines.

Weinstein hired Ron Galotti, the publisher of *Vogue*, and persuaded Hearst, the nation's third-largest magazine company, to become his partner. He also announced the start of Talk Miramax Books, which would be overseen by Brown and owned by Miramax. When *Talk* was launched, in August of 1999, Weinstein and Brown invited fourteen hundred guests to be ferried to Liberty Island to mingle with celebrities ranging from Madonna to Henry Kissinger.

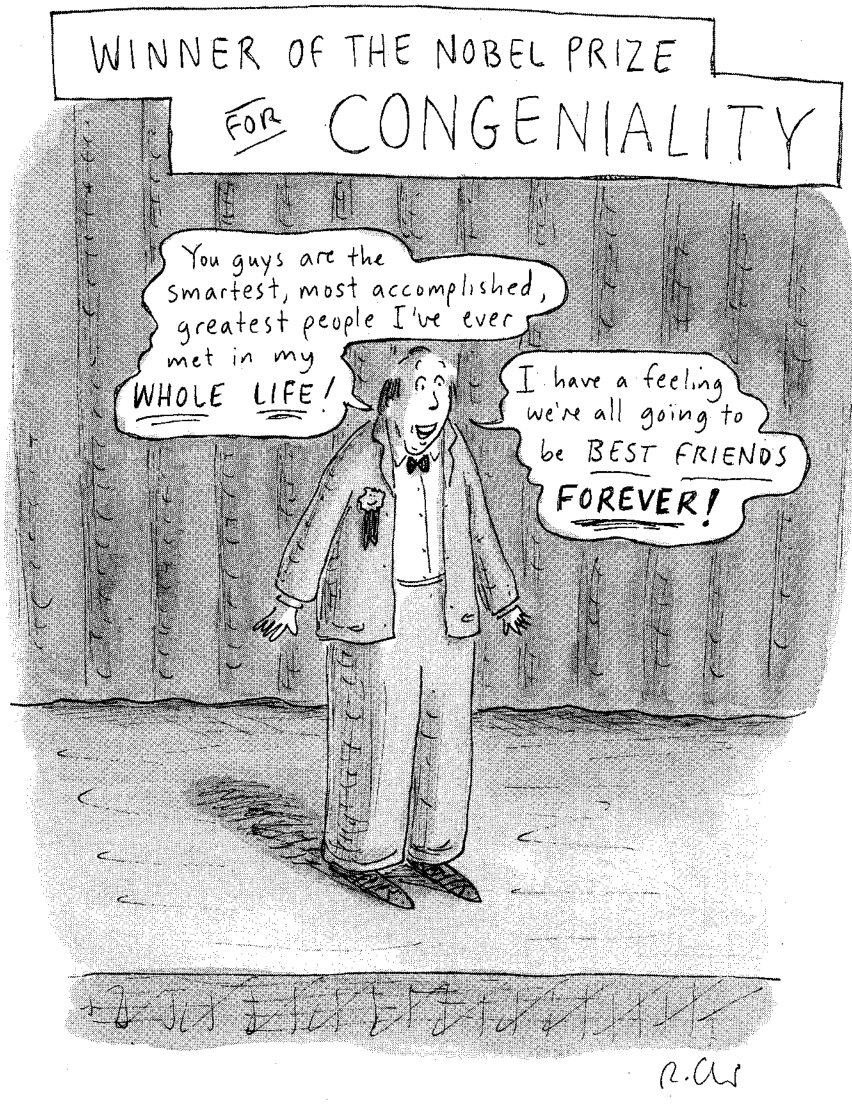
But, if the nineties ended triumphantly, the new millennium began miserably. During Weinstein's annual Christmas vacation in St. Bart's with his wife and children, he came down with what was said to be a serious bacterial infection. He was evacuated by private plane and hospitalized for more than a month, under another name, at a New York hospital, with no one but family members and old friends, such as Gene Fahey and Dennis Ward, allowed to visit. For two months, his only business conversations were with his brother.

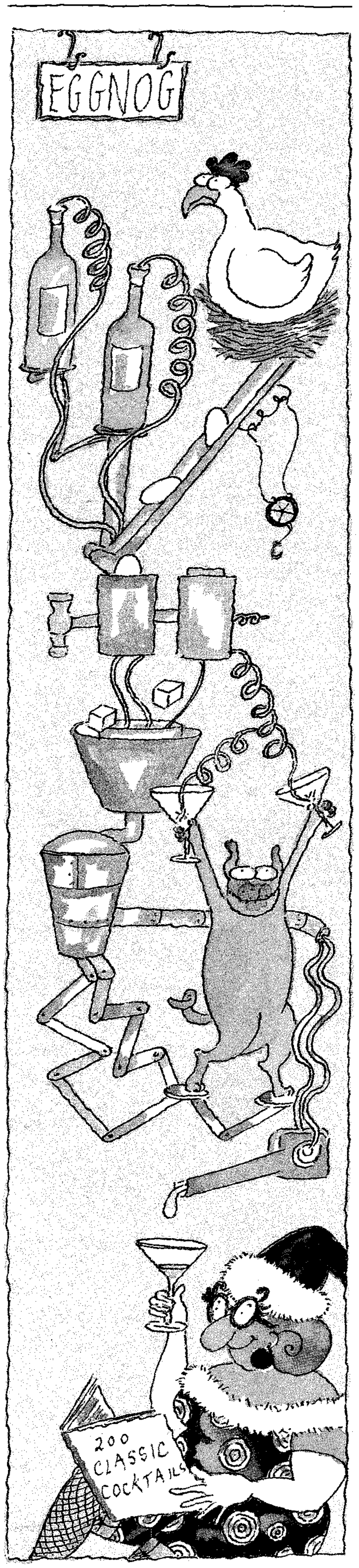
To protect her family's privacy, Eve Weinstein refuses to grant interviews, and she insisted that Harvey say nothing about his illness. "It was a bacterial disorder" was all that Weinstein would say when I asked him about it. "I'm fully recovered." Michael Eisner and Disney were told no more. "I just know what you know," Eisner said. But, because Harvey and Bob have a personal-service contract that requires medical examinations for life insurance, Eisner says, "we asked that we be given assurances of his health. We got that."

Weinstein came out of the hospital forty pounds lighter. He quit smoking. But when he returned to work he seemed more frenetic, and his brawls became more frequent. Talent agents were angry when he called clients directly. Studios were angry when he tried to share the profits but not the risks, as Miramax and Universal had with "Shakespeare in Love." Weinstein seemed to want to change the rules. For example, he wouldn't release John Madden from a two-picture contract to direct for Universal and Working Title unless Miramax was made a partner and also got domestic distribution rights to "Bridget Jones's Diary." Weinstein told *Premiere* that he saw this as a way to "do big movies with no risk." To a senior movie executive who was involved in these negotiations, it sounded like "extortion." Weinstein had similar battles with Sony Pictures over "All the Pretty Horses" and with DreamWorks when he refused to release Lasse Hallström to direct "Catch Me If You Can." He says that everyone in Hollywood does the same. "Every time Steve Spielberg has gone up to the plate and said, 'I want to direct a movie,' the same people who criticize me go and get half the movie."

To be sure, every studio feels possessive about its talent; signed options with actors and directors are a return on investment. But Weinstein is different, one studio head told me, in that he will use an option "in a punitive way." Weinstein doesn't want to share the costs of the movie or trade half an interest in a Miramax film; instead, his partners, this studio head said, feel "raped"—a word often invoked by those dealing with him. The executive continued, "In the many years I have worked in this business, I never once stopped an artist from doing a project. Harvey does it all the time."

Weinstein even fought with Dis-


WINNER OF THE NOBEL PRIZE FOR CONGENIALITY
You guys are the smartest, most accomplished, greatest people I've ever met in my WHOLE LIFE!
I have a feeling we're all going to be BEST FRIENDS FOREVER!



VICTORIA ROBERTS

ney. When he lost a bid to buy the movie rights to "Ghost Soldiers," the best-selling book by Hampton Sides about the Second World War rescue of American soldiers from a Bataan P.O.W. camp, Weinstein decided to make his own movie, based on a similar story, which he'd owned since 1999. Spielberg, who was to direct the film for Marc Platt, at Universal, who had won the "Ghost Soldiers" rights, dropped the project, and Platt sold "Ghost Soldiers" to ABC as a miniseries—which meant that Disney was, in effect, financing two competing movies.

Weinstein took on *Vanity Fair's* Graydon Carter, the co-founder and co-editor of *Spy*—a magazine that had made fun of the Weinstein brothers. When Carter was leaving the Atlantic, a restaurant in Los Angeles, and passed Weinstein, Weinstein called out, "I hear you're doing a story on me?"

"No, we're *not*," Carter recalls saying.

"Well, I hear you are," Weinstein said.

"We're not—I would know," Carter said.

"I could do a story on *Spy* and all the drugs used there," Weinstein said.

"Not true," Carter replied, with a laugh, adding that *Spy* didn't pay enough money to buy drugs.

"I have my own magazine now!" Weinstein said, and they glared at each other. "Let's take this outside," he added.

Carter, like Barry Diller, imagined a fistfight. Instead, he said, "the second we hit the outside air, he put his arm around me and said, 'Graydon, you're a great editor. I just want you to know that. I hope my magazine will be half as good.' " Carter was unimpressed: "It was all for show. To look good. To intimidate me." Weinstein insists the exchange was civil, adding, "We went outside to take a walk."

At a book party for a friend in New York, Weinstein got annoyed at a reporter who insisted on asking him about a Miramax film project. Weinstein eventually began to berate her; when another reporter, Andrew Goldman, of the New York *Observer*, tried to intervene, Weinstein turned on Goldman, who was recording the exchange. In words captured on Goldman's tape recorder, Weinstein can be heard declaring, "You know what? It's good that I'm the fucking sheriff of this fucking lawless piece-of-shit town." The altercation moved outside, whereupon Weinstein grabbed Goldman in a headlock. Goldman announced that he might file a harassment complaint against Weinstein. A Miramax spokesman later said, "Nobody acted like Albert Einstein, including Harvey." Photographers took pictures of the fracas, but the pictures never appeared anywhere. Goldman never filed charges.

Weinstein got deeper into politics. He was not only a friend of President Clinton's; he supported the Senate campaigns of Charles Schumer, in 1998, and Hillary Clinton, in 2000. He cochaired a Radio City Music Hall fund-raising event for Al Gore's Presidential candidacy. Long before 9/11, Weinstein arranged for Talk Miramax Books to sign a three-million-dollar, two-book contract with Rudolph Giuliani and a nearly one-million-dollar contract with former Secretary of State Madeleine Albright. Miramax employees contributed $45,500 to Hillary Clinton, according to records at the Federal Elections Commission. Weinstein's reach also extended to Republicans; this year, he raised around two hundred thousand dollars for Governor George Pataki, of New York. All in all, between 1998 and 2002, according to Weinstein, he and his wife gave candidates a total of seven hundred and fifty thousand dollars and raised fourteen million more.

A fifty-third-birthday party and fund-raiser for Hillary Clinton at Roseland, in 2000, became a Weinstein obsession, and he spent hours helping arrange it. Nathan Lane was the master of ceremonies, and Weinstein wanted a run-through of Lane's jokes. "Harvey was concerned about the propriety of some of Nathan's material, and they got into an argument about it," the actor and director James Naughton, who directed the entertainment, told me. (At the fund-raiser for Al Gore, Weinstein had been upset by some of John Leguizamo's material, which was politically embarrassing.) Suddenly, Weinstein screamed at Lane, according to several witnesses, "Listen, you'll do what I tell you or you're off the show!" Lane declined to comment; Weinstein denied that this happened. One witness, a friend of Mrs. Clinton's, said of Weinstein, "He's the most volatile man I've ever met."

Last summer, I accompanied Weinstein to an unlikely venue: the Red Hook Container Terminal, in Brooklyn, where Senator Schumer wanted to call attention to a nuclear-security bill that he planned to introduce. Somebody had the idea of getting Ben Affleck to appear with him; Affleck had just starred in "The Sum of All Fears," in which he fights terrorists intent on smuggling nuclear devices into the United States. So, Schumer said, "I called Harvey," who agreed to call the actor on one condition, that Schumer see the movie. Schumer did, and Weinstein called Affleck.

The three of them—Weinstein, Schumer, and Affleck—arrived separately in Red Hook on a sticky, ninety-five-degree day. Schumer and Affleck wore dark suits and ties; Weinstein had on his usual three-quarter-sleeve wool knit shirt and a light-gray suit. Six TV cameras—no doubt, six more than Schumer otherwise would have lured to Brooklyn—recorded Affleck describing himself as a citizen and a New Yorker who learned from talking to experts that "no one thought it was difficult to smuggle nuclear devices into this country."

Schumer, standing beside Affleck, nodded. Weinstein nodded, too, but he stood behind the cameras, unrecognized by reporters. When Schumer called out his name, Weinstein continued to stare straight ahead, his jacket hooked over a finger, a Carlton lit, sweat on his forehead. "You don't want to get bigger than your movie stars," Weinstein said when I asked about his modesty.

Weinstein jumped into last fall's mayoral election, supporting the public advocate, Mark Green, a Democrat, who had defeated Fernando Ferrer, the Bronx borough president, in a bitter primary. On the day before the election, Weinstein, without telling Green, arranged a "unity summit," and invited Ferrer and the Reverend Al Sharpton, hoping that they would embrace Green. Weinstein says he believed that Green's advisers supported his initiative, but when Green learned about the meeting he was furious; he didn't want to be seen as surrendering to Sharpton. Weinstein confirms that he shouted, "Fuck you guys. You don't know what you're doing. You don't know how to deal with blacks and Latinos. I can save the city." That night, Weinstein endorsed the Republican candidate, Michael Bloomberg. Green says, "I asked Harvey's people one question to ask Harvey after he endorsed Bloomberg: Would Harvey have given me final cut on 'Shakespeare in Love'?"

Weinstein was center stage after 9/11, when he threw himself into organizing a fund-raiser for the victims—"The Concert for New York City," at Madison Square Garden, which raised nearly thirty-five million dollars. Weinstein recruited as his co-chairmen James L. Dolan, the president of Cablevision, which owns the Garden, and John Sykes, the president of Infinity Broadcasting. He also brought in Paul McCartney, whom he knew from his rock-promoter days in Buffalo. Weinstein arranged with the hotelier Ian Schrager for the cast to go to the Hudson Hotel for a party after the concert. At around 3 A.M., people tried to coax McCartney into performing. Weinstein went over and wheedled, charmed, almost physically propelled McCartney onstage. The band began playing a Lennon-McCartney tune, "I Saw Her Standing There." Weinstein says, with satisfaction, "I never had a night like that in my life."

VI

Weinstein admits that, with his political and other activities, he lost focus. "All of a sudden," he says, "I was, you know—the Senate race, the Presidential race . . ." He paused briefly. "Maybe it's the mortality you feel coming out of the hospital, you feel there are things that are more important." While he was ill, he made a vow to support Scorsese's "Gangs of New York"; but, because the film eventually cost at least a hundred million dollars and featured stars like Leonardo DiCaprio and Cameron Diaz, it was cited as evidence that Weinstein and Miramax had abandoned their roots. This theory was reinforced when Miramax signed up a number of big-budget movies—"Captain Corelli's Mandolin," with Nicolas Cage and Penelope Cruz; "Serendipity," with John Cusack; "Kate & Leopold," with Meg Ryan. None of these were typical Miramax fare.

Miramax was shut out at the 2000 Oscars, although it received ten nominations, while other independent-film companies, often affiliated with major studios, were thriving with the kind of movies that had once been Miramax's signature: USA Films with "Traffic," Sony Pictures Classics with "Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon," and Paramount Classics with "You Can Count on Me."

When Weinstein is unhappy, he doesn't hide his emotions; as a result, the Miramax staff suffers from something akin to battered-spouse syndrome. Amanda Lundberg, who started at the company in 1988, left in 1992, and came back to run the movie-publicity department, says that Weinstein "can be over the top," but she also defends him: "When you're talking to Harvey and having an argument, he wants to know what you think. He will hear you." Staff members at Miramax often rise through the ranks and are encouraged to speak their minds and shout back; many think of themselves as part of a family. But it is a decidedly patriarchal family.

Weinstein was spending more time with Tina Brown and *Talk*, which had yet to generate much talk. This created strains among the Miramax staff, who often found themselves waiting for meetings while Weinstein was distracted by the magazine. There was also evidence of business friction between Bob and Harvey. Although the brothers insist that the shift was unrelated to Harvey's outside activities, in 2001 Bob moved his office to another floor. He began to concentrate more on Dimension Films, which generated sixty-five per cent of Miramax's profits that year. Bob told *Time* last spring that for the past six years Dimension had been the major breadwinner, adding, "I'm very focussed on the movie business," and implying that his brother was not. Often, staff members noticed Bob rolling his eyes at a Harvey project, though he never spoke badly of his brother.

Bob challenged Harvey's decision to coöperate on this story. At a test screening of "Confessions of a Dangerous Mind," in Edgewater, New Jersey, Bob looked at his brother and at me, and said, "This is crazy!," before walking away. ("Confessions," directed by George Clooney, is based on a book by the game-show creator Chuck Barris.) Although I made regular requests to Bob Weinstein through his brother and through his spokesman, it took about three months to arrange an interview—and he finally agreed because I'd asked about the company's finances. When the hour arrived, Bob said that he would talk only off the record and only about Miramax's business. When I objected to these ground rules, he threatened to leave; Harvey was called in, and eventually persuaded Bob to chat. After twenty minutes or so, I asked about Max Weinstein. Bob erupted, screaming at Harvey for talking to me about their father, and insisting that Harvey knew he was writing an essay of his own about Max Weinstein. He calmed down, politely apologized, and left. Weeks later, Bob—who Harvey said had submitted his essay to *Vanity Fair*, where it will be published—was still yelling at his brother for betraying him, and Harvey was pleading with me to avoid mentioning their father.

No one believes that the brothers are going their separate ways. Not a chance, according to Michael Eisner. "They are extremely loyal to each other," Eisner told me. "They may fight, but if someone comes in between they close ranks. A lot of other families are dysfunctional. There is no loyalty. I love it when one defends the other when he knows the other is wrong."

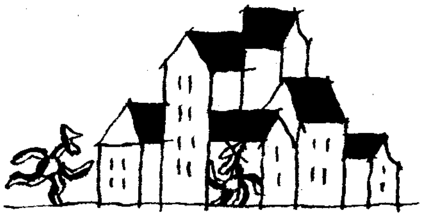
There was nevertheless stress, probably exacerbated by the weakened economy, and press reports in recent weeks have said that the company will be in trouble if Miramax's movies falter this Christmas. According to a top Miramax official, profits, although down twelve per cent, were a hundred and forty million dollars for the fiscal year that ended September 30th. Disney does not break out its profits by division, but a senior Disney official says that the Miramax figure "is not in any way accurate"; still, he says, Miramax is comfortably profitable. (Miramax's accounting rules do not conform to Disney's.) In any case, the current fiscal year is only in its first quarter; among the films that Miramax is counting on in the coming year are "The Human Stain," from the Philip Roth novel, starring Nicole Kidman and directed by Robert Benton; Kevin Smith's "Jersey Girl," starring Jennifer Lopez and Ben Affleck; and Quentin Tarantino's "Kill Bill."

Last January, Weinstein shut down *Talk* (though not the book division). "It was very natural," Cathleen P. Black, the president of Hearst Magazines, says. "Harvey might have wanted to stay in longer, but as we looked at the vital signs of the magazine we just didn't see a big enough turn in the magazine so that it would be a significant competitor to *Vanity Fair*." The magazine had losses estimated at fifty-five million dollars, half of which were charged to Hearst.

Publicly, Weinstein has been gracious, praising his publisher and editor and saying of himself, "I didn't do a great job, because I didn't understand the business." Privately, Weinstein made sure that the story wouldn't become ugly; as he often does when getting a business divorce, he made generous payments to Brown and Galotti, on the condition that they sign elaborate confidentiality agreements not to publicly disparage Weinstein or Miramax or to reveal company secrets. Last spring, Miramax laid off fifteen per cent of its worldwide staff of five hundred.

Harvey and Bob were also feuding with Disney, not only because both Miramax and ABC were going ahead with competing versions of the P.O.W. movie but because of a proposed audit of Miramax. One senior Disney executive said Eisner wanted assurance that Miramax's books were transparent and that the Weinstein brothers had engaged in no "creative accounting." It particularly rankled Disney executives that Miramax's accounting rules inflated the Weinsteins' personal compensation, which is based on profit-sharing. Eisner downplayed the audit. "Whatever audit was going on is a normal audit about how you account for a personal-services contract that relates to Bob and Harvey," he said. The brothers saw it as an attack on their independence, and hired two well-known litigators, David Boies and Bert Fields, to challenge it.

In August, Eisner talked to the entertainment attorney John Eastman. In the course of the conversation, Eastman mentioned that he was having breakfast the next day with his old friend Harvey Weinstein. "Perhaps you can bridge the gap between Harvey and the company," he remembers Eisner saying. After the breakfast, Weinstein phoned Eisner and promised, "I'm going to be a good corporate citizen." Within days, Disney had downgraded the audit to what it called a routine "analysis," and ordered ABC to terminate "Ghost Soldiers."

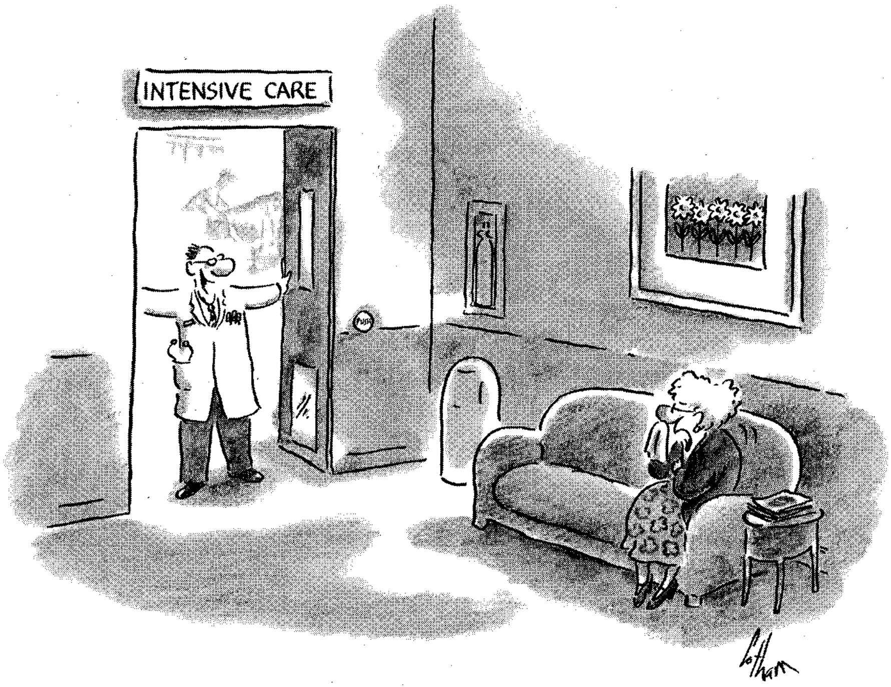


Weinstein started chain-smoking again last January, and his weight ballooned. But, even if he had reached a truce with Disney, it no longer seemed possible for him to arrange a truce with the rest of Hollywood; the fights, the shouting, the interference, the physical intimidation—all of it was catching up with him. Bingham Ray, of United Artists, believes that Weinstein has violated the spirit behind independent filmmaking. "He orders reshoots of some of the finest filmmakers and has redrafted countless scripts," he said. "We're dedicated to releasing other people's films. I've never allowed myself—or an employee of mine—to put myself on as an executive producer. It's disgusting. We're not the filmmaker."

Brad Grey, who also attended SUNY Buffalo, worked for Harvey & Corky Presents, and is now the C.E.O. of Brillstein-Grey, a talent-management and production agency, said with a smile, "Harvey and I have been friends for twenty-five years. He and I both know that the secret to our friendship continuing for a twenty-sixth year is the discipline of our doing as little business together as possible, and communicating at a minimum."

A senior Disney executive, anticipating Harvey Weinstein's downfall, observed, "In Hollywood, they don't root for you until they hear your cancer is terminal. This is a town that smells blood. When they smell blood, they circle like sharks. In Harvey's case, there is a sense that his streak has waned, that the magic may be gone." One powerful agent, who has championed Miramax since the late eighties, now says of Weinstein, "He was on track to be one of the greats of this business. The degree of narcissism and the number of people he's alienated has caught up with him. What was once charming is now seen as reprehensible. I told him this. Harvey's life in show business is going to be a great book. I hope Harvey in the end is closer to who he was at the beginning."

Few people in the movie industry will say this to Weinstein. Instead, one begins to hear what Jay Cocks calls "the weird tonal vocabulary of Hollywood." People go to screenings and snicker that the movie is awful, then, when the lights go



"Ah, the lovely widow!"

• •

on and they see the director, they say, "Your movie is wonderful." And it is true that some of the people who helped bring down Michael Ovitz are after Harvey Weinstein, though not often openly. Some executives will, in describing Weinstein to a reporter, characterize him as Mob-like, and then telephone him to say that they tried to be generous but doubted the motives of the reporter. Jay Cocks, who was a movie reviewer for *Time* before becoming a screenwriter, says, "They are all so busy being polite to each other that they forget how to be honest to each other. That leaks over to their movies, which is why there is so much synthetic emotion in films."

Weinstein doesn't doubt that the Hollywood establishment wishes him ill, but he doesn't think it's personal. "I think Hollywood's long knives are out for everybody," he told me. "That's sort of a way of life out there. If somebody's held in high esteem, based on, you know, hits, or something like that, then five minutes later everybody's got a knife out for them. It's the way of life."

Some people, like Gwyneth Paltrow, remain loyal to Weinstein but also understand what his detractors feel. "I love him very much," Paltrow says. "He's very passionate about what he does, and he's very competitive. The mistake is that it's very personal to him. He can't separate it."

Meryl Poster, who joined the company in 1989 and is now Miramax's co-president of production, is, next to Bob, Harvey's closest movie adviser. Poster, who considers him "a genius," says, "Harvey doesn't like to say no. And I think he gets into trouble sometimes that way—because he says things off the top of his head, instead of thinking them out. He says things all the time that he means at the moment, but can't financially work, and then it has to be rescinded, retracted, and changed. It's the instant gratification with him. That's why he's fat. He doesn't say no to food or cigarettes." The brothers have invested in plays and half a dozen restaurants, and want to do more. Harvey Weinstein says that a high priority is launching a Miramax cable channel to tap Miramax's film library. He plans to acquire and sell DVDs more aggressively. He wants to direct a film of a favorite novel from his youth, Leon Uris's "Mila 18." He's also writing a screenplay based on a children's book, and an autobiography. He says he'd love to own the New York Mets.

The Weinstein brothers were thrilled when, in October, the British Film Institute awarded them its highest honor for contributions to the industry—the first time in the organization's long history that studio executives had received the award. But the brothers know that it's not a great time for Miramax. Not only was there just one Oscar victory last year out of fifteen nominations; 2002 also had a fair number of costly flops, including "The Four Feathers," "The Importance of Being Earnest," and "40 Days and 40 Nights." Weinstein is betting that his two big Christmas releases, "Gangs of New York" and a movie version of the musical "Chicago," which preview audiences appear to like, will be winners. But musicals are always iffy, and early audiences have not been noticeably enthusiastic about "Gangs."

Miramax still produces movies in the old tradition: Atom Egoyan's "Ararat," which explores Turkey's role in the massacre of hundreds of thousands of Armenians nearly a century ago, released last month; and Peter Mullan's "Magdalene Sisters," about the mistreatment of "morally deviant" young women by nuns in Ireland, to be released next year. Weinstein still believes that he is different from most studio executives. "My loyalty is to the audience," he says. "I'm still the kid who walked into the Mayfair movie theatre."

Whether or not Harvey Weinstein has changed, the world around him has; his imagined enemies have become real. "Because of his success, the industry expects more of him, and wants him to relax his style," Marcy Granata, who was president of publicity and communications at Miramax for seven years and was one of his closest advisers, says. "But here is the rub. He's defined himself as the last angry man. He thrives on being an underdog who comes out the top dog—the winner—time after time. Anger is an ally, a tool. When he's winning, he stays angry to keep his edge. When he's losing, he stays angry to get back on top." Granata, who respects Weinstein, goes on, "He wants to go down as another Thalberg—and in the big picture he's held himself to that standard. He will always be this push-me, pull-you creature seducing industry people with his charisma, intelligence, authenticity, conveying a passion that has no rival—and scaring the shit out of them at the same time. His mojo is to harass until he gets perfection. If he were organized, buttoned down, mannered, and in control, it would be the end of his success. And he knows it. Much as he tries to adopt 'that other guy'—to let that guy take over completely would be the end of him."♦

FICTION

THE BARE MANUSCRIPT

BY ARTHUR MILLER

Carol Mundt lay on the desk, propped up on her elbows, reading a cooking article in *You*. She was six feet tall and a hundred and sixty pounds of muscle, bone, and sinew, with only a slightly bulging belly. In Saskatchewan she had not stood out for her size, but here in New York it was a different story. She shifted to take the pressure off her pelvis. Clement said, "Please," and she went still again. She could hear his speeded-up breathing over the back of her head and now and then a soft little sniffing.

"You can sit up now if you like," Clement said. She rolled onto her side and swivelled up to a sitting position, her legs dangling. "I need a few minutes," he said, and added jokingly, "I have to digest this," and laughed sweetly. Then he went over to his red leather armchair, which faced the dormer window that looked uptown as far as Twenty-third Street. Sighing, getting comfortable in his chair, he stared over the sunny rooftops. The house was the last remaining brownstone on a block of old converted warehouses and newish apartment houses. Carol let her head hang forward to relax, sensing that she was not to speak at such moments, then slid off the desk, her buttocks making a zipping sound as they came unstuck from the wood, and crossed the large study to the tiny bathroom, where she sat studying a recipe in the *Times* for meat loaf. Three or four minutes later, she heard "O.K.!" through the thin bathroom door, and hurried back to the desk, where she stretched out prone, this time resting her cheek on the back of one hand, and closed her eyes. In a moment, she felt the gentle movement of the marker on the back of her thigh and tried to imagine the words it was making. He started on her left buttock, making short grunts that conveyed his rising excitement, and she kept herself perfectly still to avoid distracting him, as if he were operating on her. He began writing faster and faster, and the periods and the dots over the "i"s pushed deep into her flesh. His breathing was louder, reminding her again what a privilege it was to serve genius in this way, to help a writer who, according to his book jacket, had won so many prizes before he was even thirty and was possibly rich, although the furniture didn't match and had a worn look. She felt the power of his mind like the big hand pressing down on her back, like a real object with weight and size, and she felt honored and successful and congratulated herself for having dared answer his ad.

Clement was now writing on the back of her calf. "You can read, if you like," he whispered.

"I'm just resting. Is everything O.K.?"

"Yes, great. Don't move."

He was down around her ankle when the marker came to a halt. "Please turn over," he said.

She rolled onto her back and lay looking up at him.

He stared down at her body, noting the little smile of embarrassment on her face. "You feeling all right about this?"

"Oh, yes," she said, in this position nearly choking on her high automatic laugh.

"Good. You're helping me a lot. I'll start here, O.K.?" He touched just below her solid round breasts.

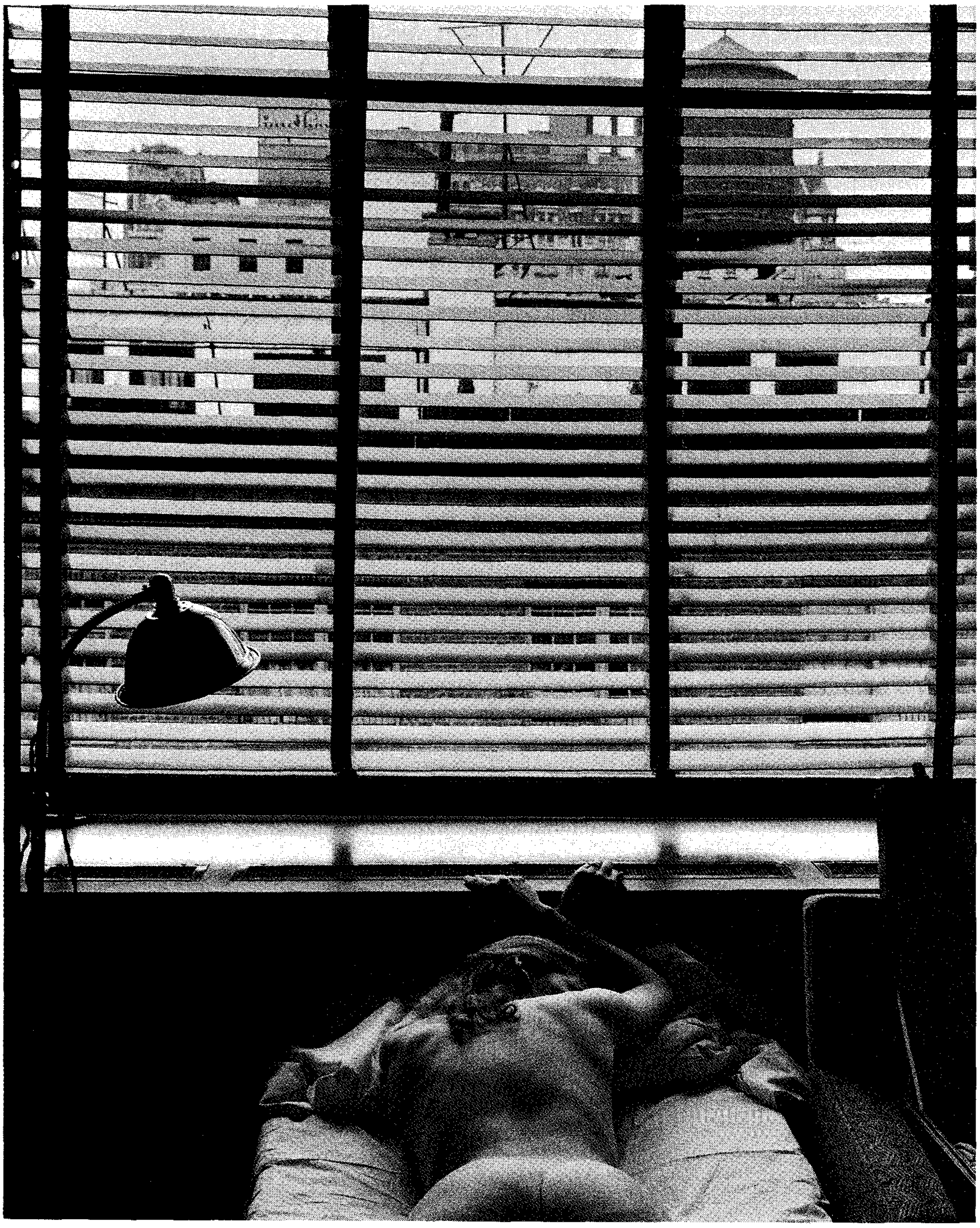
"Wherever," she said.

Clement pushed up his wire-rimmed glasses. He was half a head shorter than this giantess, whose affectionate guffaws, he supposed, were her way of hiding her shyness. But her empty optimism and that damned Midwestern affliction of regular-fella good will annoyed him, especially in a woman—it masculinized her. He respected decisive women, but from a distance, much preferring the inexplicit kind, like his wife, Lena. Or, rather, like Lena as she once was. He would love to be able to tell this one on his desk to relax and let her bewildered side show, for he had grasped her basic tomboy story and her dating dilemmas the moment she'd mentioned how she'd had her own rifle up home and adored hunting deer with her brothers Wally and George. And now, he surmised, with her thirties racing toward her, the joke was over but the camouflaging guffaws remained, like a shell abandoned by some animal.

With his left hand, he slightly stretched the skin under her breast so that the marker could glide over it, and his touch raised her eyebrows and produced a slightly surprised smile. Humanity was a pitiful thing. An inchoate, uncertain joy was creeping into him now; he had not felt this kind of effortless shaping in his sentences since his first novel, his best, which had absolutely written itself and made his name. Something was happening in him that had not happened in years: he was writing from the groin.

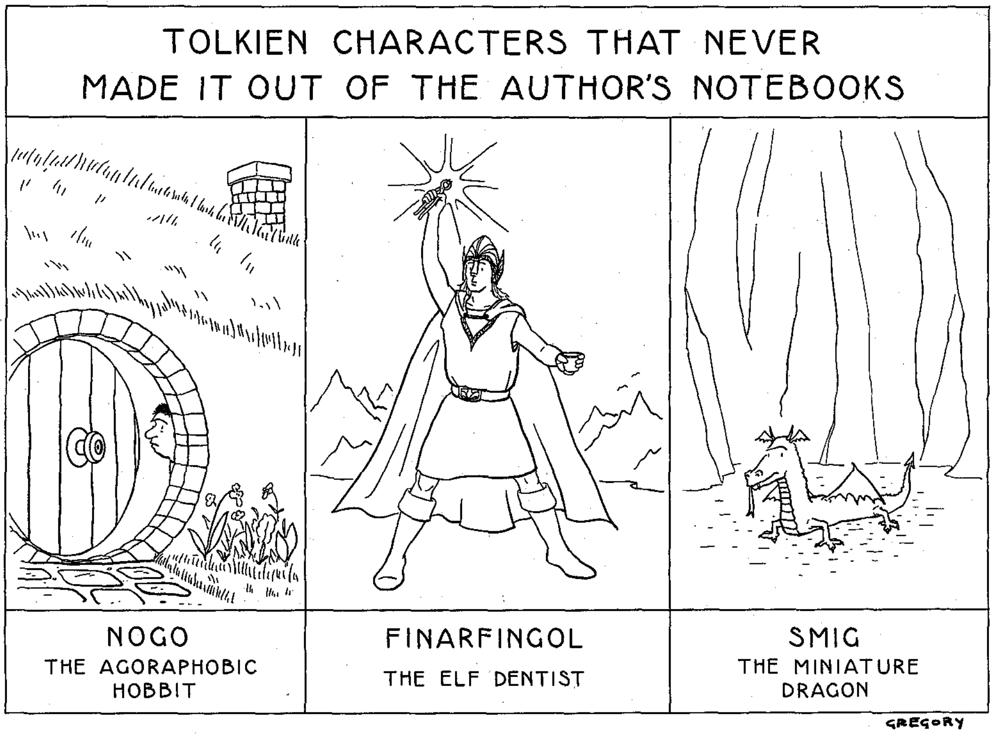
Self-awareness had gnawed away at his early lyricism. His reigning suspicion was simply that his vanishing youth had taken his talent with it. He had been young a very long time. Even now his being young was practically his profession, so that youthfulness had become something he despised and could not live without. Maybe he could no longer find a style of his own because he was afraid of his fear, and so instead of brave sentences that were genuinely his own he was helplessly writing hollow imitation sentences that could have belonged to anybody. Long ago he had been able to almost touch the characters his imagining had provided, but slowly these had been replaced by a kind of empty white surface like cold, glowing granite or a gessoed canvas. He often thought of himself as having lost a gift, almost a holiness. At twenty-two, winner of the

EDWARD WESTON, "NUDE" (1941) ©1981 CENTER FOR CREATIVE PHOTOGRAPHY, ARIZONA BOARD OF REGENTS



Neiman-Felker Award, and, soon after, the Boston Prize, he had quietly enjoyed an anointment that, among other blessings, would prevent him, in effect, from ever growing old. After some ten years of marriage, he began groping around for that blessing in women's company, sometimes in their bodies. His boyish manner and full head of hair and compact build and ready laughter, but mainly his unthreatening vagueness, moved some women to adopt him for a night, for a week, sometimes for months, until he or they wandered off, distracted. Sex revived him, but only until he was staring down at a blank sheet of paper, when once again he knew death's silence.

To save the marriage, Lena had pointed him toward psychoanalysis, but his artist's aversion to prying into his own mind and risking the replacement of his magic blindness with everyday common sense kept him off the couch. Nevertheless, he had gradually given way to Lena's insistence—her degree had been in social psychology—that his father might have injured him far more profoundly than he had ever dared admit. A chicken farmer in a depressed area near Peekskill, on the Hudson, Max Zorn had a fanatical need to discipline his son and four daughters. Clement at nine, having accidentally beheaded a chicken by shutting a door on its neck, was locked in a windowless potato cellar for a whole night, and for the rest of his life had been unable to sleep without a light on. He had also had to get up to pee two or three times a night, no doubt as a consequence of his terror of peeing on potatoes in the dark. Emerging into the morning light with the open blue sky over his head, he asked his father's pardon. A smile grew on his father's stubbled face, and he burst out



laughing as he saw that Clement was pissing in his pants. Clement ran into the woods, his body shaking with chills, his teeth chattering despite the warm spring morning. He lay down on a broken hay bale that was being warmed by the sun and covered himself with the stalks. The experience was in principle more or less parallel to that of his youngest sister, Margie, who in her teens took to staying out past midnight, defying her father. Returning from a date one night, she reached up to the cord hanging from the overhead light fixture in the entrance hall and grasped a still warm dead rat that her father had hung there to teach her a lesson.

But none of this entered Clement's first story, which he expanded into his signature novel. Instead, the book described his faintly disguised mother's adoration of him, and pictured his father as a basically well-meaning, if sad, man who had some difficulty with expressing affection, nothing more. Clement, in general, would always find it hard to condemn; Lena thought that for him the levelling of judgment in itself was a challenge to confront his father and symbolically invited a second entombment. And so his writing was romantically left-wing, a note of wistful protest always trembling in it somewhere, and if this quality of innocence was attractive in his first book it seemed predictably formulaic thereafter. In fact, he would join the sixties' anarchic revolt against forms with enormous relief, having come to despair of structure itself as the enemy of the poetic; but structure in art—so Lena told him—implied inevitability, which threatened to turn him toward murder, the logical response to his father's terrifying crimes. This news was too unpleasant to take seriously, and so in the end he remained a rather lyrical and winningly cheerful fellow, if privately unhappy with his unbudging harmlessness.

Lena understood him; it was easy, since she shared his traits. "We are charter members of the broken-wing society," she said late one night while cleaning up after one of their parties. For a while in their late twenties and thirties, a party seemed to coagulate every weekend in their Brooklyn Heights living room. People simply showed up and were gladly welcomed to smoke their cigarettes, from which Lena snipped off the filters, to flop on the carpet and sprawl on the worn furniture, to drink the wine they'd brought and talk about the new play or movie or novel or poem; also to lament Eisenhower's collapsed syntax, the blacklisting of writers in radio and Hollywood, the mystifying new hostility of blacks toward Jews, their traditional allies, the State Department's lifting of suspect radicals' passports, the perplexing irrational silence that they felt closing in on the country as its new conservatism went about scooping out and flipping away its very memory of the previous thirty years, of the Depression and the New Deal, even changing the war's Nazi enemy into a kind of defender against the formerly allied Russians. Some were refreshed by the Zorns' hospitality and went into the night either newly joined or alone but, either way, under the influence of a forlorn time of lost valor: they saw themselves as a lucid minority in a country where ignorance of the world's revolution was bliss, money was getting easier to make, the psychoanalyst the ultimate authority, and an uncommitted personal detachment the prime virtue.

In due time, Lena, uncertain about everything except that she was lost, analyzed matters and saw that she, like his sentences, was no longer his, and that their life had become what he took to saying his writing had become: an imitation. They went on living together, now in a lower-Manhattan brownstone on permanent loan by the homosexual heir of a steel fortune, who believed Clement was another Keats. But Clement often slept on the third floor these days and Lena on the first. The gift of the house was only the largest of many gifts that people dropped on them: a camel's-hair coat came from a doctor friend who found that he needed a larger size; the use of a cottage on Cape Cod year after year from a couple who went off to Europe every summer, and with it an old but well-maintained Buick. Fate also provided. Walking along a dark street one night, Clement kicked something metallic, which turned out to be a can of anchovies. Bringing it home, he found that it needed a special key and put it in a cupboard. More than a month later, on a different street, he once again kicked metal—the key to the can. He and Lena, both anchovy lovers, instantly broke out some crackers and sat down and ate the whole thing.

They still had some laughs together, but mostly they shared a low-level pain that neither of them had the strength to bring to a head, both feeling they had let the other down. "We even have an imitation divorce," she said, and he laughed and agreed, and they went on anyway with nothing changed except that she cut her long wavy blond hair and took a job as a child counsellor. Despite their never having been able to decide to have a child, she understood children instinctively, and he saw with some dismay that her work was making her happy. At least for a while, she seemed to perk up with some sort of self-discovery, and this threatened to leave him behind. But in less than a year she quit, announcing, "I simply cannot go to the same place every day." This was the return of the old crazy lyrical Lena, and it pleased him despite his alarm at the loss of her salary. They were beginning to need more money than he could make, with the sales of his books falling to near nothing. As for sex, it was hard for her to recall when it had meant very much to her. Gradually, it was a four- or five-times-a-year indulgence, if that. His affairs, which she suspected but refused to confirm, relieved her of a burden even as they gnawed at what was left of her self-regard. His view was that a man had to *go* somewhere with his erection, while a woman felt she *was* somewhere. A big difference. But in a cruel moment he admitted to himself that she was too unhappy to be happily screwed, a condition he blamed on her background.

Then one summer afternoon, while smoking his pipe on the rickety step of their donated beach cottage, he saw a girl walking all alone by the lip of the sea, looking totally immersed in her thoughts, with the sun flashing across her hips, and he imagined how it would be if he could get her naked and write on her. His soul quickened. It had been a long, long time since he had had any vision of himself that brought such a lift of joy. This picture of himself writing on a woman's body was somehow wholesome and healthful, like holding a loaf of fresh bread.

He might never have placed the ad at all had Lena not finally erupted. He was up in his third-floor workroom, reading Melville, trying to cleanse his mind, when he heard screaming from downstairs. Lena, when he rushed into the living room, was sitting on the couch pouring herself into the air. He held her in his arms until she was exhausted. There was no need to talk; she was simply dying of inchoate outrage at her life, the relentless lack of money and his failure to provide some kind of lead. He held her hand, and could hardly bear to look at her ravaged face.

She grew quiet. He brought her a glass of water. They sat together on the couch, waiting for nothing. She took a Chesterfield from a pack on the coffee table, snipped off its filter with her fingernail, and lay back inhaling defiantly, Dr. Saltz having seriously warned her twice now. She was having an affair with Chesterfields, Clement thought.

"I'm thinking of writing something autobiographical," he said, somehow implying that this would bring in money.

"My mother . . ." she said, and went silent, staring.

"Yes?"

This obscure mention of her mother reminded him of the first time she had openly revealed the guilt she felt. They were sitting at Lena's rooming-house window overlooking a splendid street lined with trees in full leaf, with students idling past and the placid quiet of a Midwestern campus sequestering them from the real world, while back in Connecticut, she said, her mother was rising before five every morning to board the first streetcar for her eight-hour day in the Peerless Steam Laundry. Imagine! Noble Christa Vanetzki ironing strangers' shirts so she could send her daughter the twenty dollars a month for room and board, meanwhile refusing to let her daughter work, as most students did. Lena had to shut her eyes and squeeze her unworthiness out of her mind. To make her mother happy, she had to succeed, success would cure everything—maybe a job in social psychology with a city agency.

She was wearing her white angora sweater. "That sweater makes you glow like a spirit in this crazy light," Clement said. They went out for a walk, holding hands along the winding paths through shadows so black they seemed solid. The clarity of the moon that windless night brought it unnervingly near. "It's got to be closer than usual, or something," he said, squinting up at its light. He loved the poetry of science, but the details were too mathematical. In this amazing glare his cheekbones were more prominent and his manly

"Wow! The big guy! And what kind of B.T.U.s am I looking at here?"

jaw sculpted. They were exactly the same height. She had always known he adored her, but alone with him she could sense his body's demand. Suddenly he drew her into a clearing beneath some bushes and gently pulled her to the ground. They kissed, he fondled her breasts, and then stretched out and pressed against her to spread her legs. She felt his hardness and tensed with the fear of embarrassment. "I can't, Clement," she said, and kissed him apologetically. She had never given even this much of herself to anyone before, and she wanted her gift forgotten.

"One of these days we have to." He rolled off her.

"Why!" She laughed nervously.

"Because! Look what I bought."

He held up a condom for her to see. She took it from him and felt the smooth rubber with her thumb. She tried not to think that all his verses about her—the sonnets, the villanelles, the haiku—were merely ploys to prepare her for this ridiculous rubber balloon. She raised it to her eye like a monocle and looked up at the sky. "I can almost see the moon through it."

"What the hell are you doing!" He laughed and sat up. "The mad Vanetzkis." She sat up giggling and returned the condom to him. "What is it, your mother?" he asked.

She was dead serious. "Maybe you ought to find somebody else. We could still be friends." And then she added, "I really don't understand why I'm alive." Clement had always been moved by these quick mood changes—"the Polish depths," he called them. She had a baffling connection with some mystery across the Atlantic in the dark Polish middle of Europe, a place neither he nor she had ever been.

"Is there a poem about anything like this?"

"Like what?"

"A girl who can't find out what she thinks."

"Probably Emily Dickinson, but I can't think of a particular one. Every love poem I know ends with glory or death."

He wrapped his arms around his raised knees and stared up at the moon. "I've never seen it like this before. This must be how it makes wolves howl."

"And women go mad," she added. "Why is it always women the moon makes mad?"

"Well, they've got such a head start."

She bent forward to clear a branch from her line of sight, narrowing her gaze against the glare. "I really think it could make me crazy." In a distant way, she actually was afraid of insanity. Her father's mad death had never left her. "How close it seems. Like an eye in Heaven. I can see it frightening people. You'd think it would be warm with this brightness, but it's cold light, isn't it? Like the light of death." Her dear, childlike curiosity chilled him with anticipation of her body, which he still hoped to have someday. Was she blond down there? At the same time, she was holy and rare. Her only defect was her cheekbones, slightly too prominent but not fatally so, and the too broad Polish nose. But he was past comparing her to perfection. He opened her hand and pressed her palm to his lips. "Cathleen ni Houlihan, Elizabeth Barrett Browning, Queen Mab"—now he had her giggling pityingly—"Betty Grable . . . Who else?"

"The Karamazov woman?"

"Ah, yes, Grushenka. And who else? Peter-Paul Mounds, Baby Ruth, Cleopatra . . ." She grasped him by the head and crushed her mouth on his. She hated disappointing him like this, but the more physical she tried to become the less she felt. Maybe if they did do it, some spring would uncoil inside her. He was certainly gentle and lovable, and if anyone was to enter her before she found a husband it might as well be Clement. Or maybe not. She was certain of nothing. She let his tongue slide over hers. Her welcoming mouth surprised him, and he rolled her back and lay on her and began pumping, but she slid out from under him, got up, and walked out onto the path, and he caught up with her and had started to apologize when he saw her intense concentration. Her frustrating mood changes dangled above him like a bright-colored toy over a baby's crib. They walked in a nearly mournful silence to the road and then to her rooming house, where they stood below the deep Victorian porch, the brightness of the moon stretching their giant inky silhouettes across the grass.

"I wouldn't know how to do it."

"I could teach you."

"I'll be embarrassed."

"Only for a minute or two. It's easy."

HOLIDAYS

The month of the holidays,
where is the . . . who can find
him . . . the electrician, there
is a water problem, the oil tank
leaks, do you know what
that means? It is the holidays, there are
no electricians, no shops, no tanks,
no cisterns. Nails
are breaking, blood does not gush.
Ring, ring, ring, dial 023
dial 576 and 999. Nothing
doing, my friend. All the machines
are dead. Money doesn't speak.
Nobody. The desert.
And now come the floods.
Escape, escape quickly. Leave
everything. No point in locking
up.
Go away, far far away. The
month of the holidays.

—*Muriel Spark*

They both burst out laughing. He loved to kiss her laughing mouth. She touched his lips with her fingertips.

He stood on the sidewalk watching her incredible form going up the path to the house—her round ass, the full thighs. She turned in the doorway and waved and vanished.

He had to marry her, crazy as that sounded. But how? He had nothing, not even prospects, unless he could win another prize or be taken on as a faculty assistant. But there were hundreds with degrees higher than his looking for jobs. He was most likely going to lose her. An erection was stirring as he stood there on the moon-flooded sidewalk, a hundred feet from where she was undressing.

"Why do you bother with her?" Mrs. Vanetzki asked Clement. Carl, the white-and-black mutt, lay stretched out in the shade, dozing at her feet. It was a hot mill-town Sunday afternoon, the last day of spring break. Even the rushing Winship River looked oily and warm below the house, and in the still air shreds of the smoke of a long-departed train hung over the railroad tracks along the riverbank.

"I don't know," Clement said. "I figure she might get rich someday."

"Her? Ha!" For Clement's visit, Mrs. Vanetzki wore a carefully ironed blue cotton dress with lace trim around the collar, and white oxfords. Her reddish hair was swept up to a white comb at the top of her head, emphasizing both her height—she was half a head taller than her daughter—and, somehow, the breadth of her cheekbones and forehead. Beneath her defiant banter, Clement felt the scary force of the majestically defeated, something he could not reconcile with his hopes. A framed tinted photo in the living room showed her only ten years earlier, standing proud beside her husband, with his Byronic foulard and flowing hair, a fedora hanging from his hand. His misunderstanding of America's sometimes lethal contempt for foreignness had not yet strapped him to the stretcher and made him into a paranoid, raving in Polish to the walls of an ambulance, cursing his wife as a whore and the human race as murderers. Only Lena was left her now. The responsible one, "the only one who got herself a brain in her head." Lena's sister Patsy, the middle child, had had two abortions with different men, one of whose surnames she admitted she didn't know. She had a wild loud whine of a voice and helter-skelter in her eyes. A sweet girl, really, with a big heart, but simply barren in the head. Patsy had once heavily intimated to Clement that she knew Lena was not letting him in and that she would not mind substituting herself "a couple of times." There had been no envy or spite in this offer, simply the fact of it and no hard feelings whichever way he decided. "Hey, Clement, how about me if she won't?" Kidding, of course, except for the undeniable light in her eye.

There was also Steve, the last-born, but for her he somehow hardly counted. He was dull and sweet and heavy-footed, the peasant side of the family. Steve was like Patsy, swimming around like a carp at the bottom of the pond, but at least he wasn't sex-mad. Hamilton Propeller liked him, amazingly enough. They knew they had a serious worker, and had advanced him into calibration technology after his first six months—Steve, who was only nineteen, with but two years of high school. He would be all right, although his recent shenanigans troubled her.

"Steve does a lot of walking in his sleep, you know. Lately." Mrs. Vanetzki addressed this to Lena with an implicit request for her college-educated interpretation.

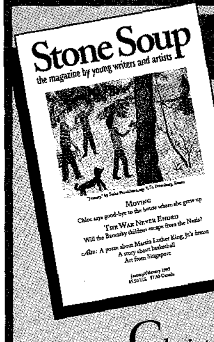
"Maybe he needs a girl," Lena ventured. Clement was astonished and amused at the irony of her speaking so easily about sex.

"Trouble is there are no whores in this town," Mrs. Vanetzki said, scratching her belly. "Patsy keeps telling him to go to Hartford for a weekend, but he doesn't understand what she's talking about. How about you, Clement?"

"Me?" Clement flushed, imagining she would be asking next if he'd slept with Lena.

"Maybe you could tell him about the birds and bees. I don't think he knows it." Lena and Clement laughed, and Mrs. Vanetzki allowed herself a suppressed grin. "I really don't think he's even heard of it, but what can be done?"

"Well, somebody has to teach him!" Lena exclaimed, worried by her broth-



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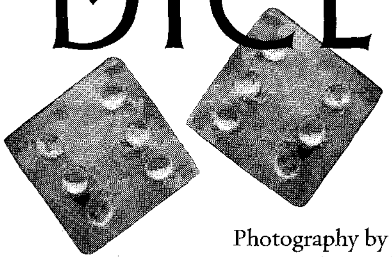

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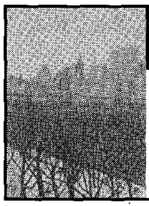

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er's persisting childishness. Clement was baffled that she could apply this level of energy to making her family face their dilemmas when she was fleeing her own.

"He seems to have bent Patsy's old bicycle," Mrs. Vanetzki said, mystified.

"Bent her bicycle!"

"When we were all asleep. He seems to have been sleepwalking in the night and gone outside and bent the front fork in his two hands. It's some kind of force in him." She turned to Clement. "Maybe you could talk to him about going to Hartford some weekend."

But before Clement could reply Mrs. Vanetzki waved him down. "Ah, you men, you never know what to do when it comes to practical."

Lena quickly defended him. "He'd be glad to talk to Steve. Wouldn't you, Clement?"

"Sure, I'd be glad to talk to him."

"But do you know anything about sex?"

"Mama!" Lena went red and screamed with laughter, but her mother barely smiled.

"Oh, I know a thing or two." Clement tried to brush off the woman's bewildering near-contempt for him.

"Now, you be nice to Clement, Mama," Lena said, and went and sat on the glider beside her mother.

"Oh, he knows not to be upset. I just say things." But she had pinned inadequacy to his nature. She pushed her heel against the floor and made the glider swing.

Nobody spoke. The glider squeaked intimately. Beyond the porch the street was silent. Mrs. Vanetzki finally turned to Clement. "The main thing that puts people's lives to ruin is sex."

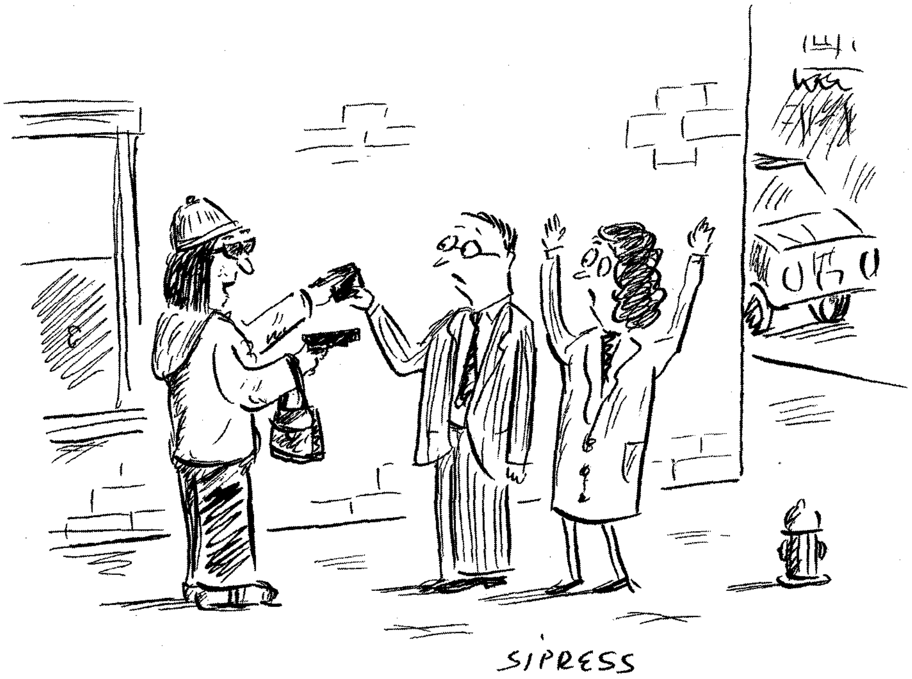
"Oh, come on—even if you love somebody? I love this crazy girl," Clement said.

"Ah, love."

Lena nervously giggled through her cigarette smoke.

"Isn't there such a thing?" Clement asked.

"Whoever is not realistic, America kills," Mrs. Vanetzki said. "You are an educated young man. You are handsome. My daughter is a mixed-up person. She will never change. Nobody changes. Only more and more is let out, that's all, the way a ball of string unwinds. Do yourself a favor—forget about her, or be friends, but don't marry. You should find a smart woman with a practical mind and clear thoughts. Marriage is a thing forever, but a wife is only good if she is practical. This girl has no idea of practical. She is a dreamer, like her poor father. The man comes to this country expecting some respect, at least for his name. Nobody respects a Polack. What did they know of Vanetzkis, who



"By the way, this isn't a robbery. It's just coercive borrowing."

go back to the Lithuanian dukes? He went crazy for a little respect, a man with engineer training. They kept wanting to make friends with him, the kind of people he wouldn't have spoken to in the old country, except maybe to get his shoes shined. So he comes to Akron and Detroit and then here looking for a cultured circle. This is the nature of Lena's father. He didn't know that here you are either a failure or a success, not a human being with a name. So he went raving to his grave. Don't talk about marriage. Please, for both your sakes, leave her to herself. Our Patsy, yes—she should be married. Only marriage can save her, and even that I doubt. But not this one." She turned now to look at her elder daughter, who had giggled in loving embarrassment through all her remarks. "Have you told him how lost you are?"

"Yes," Lena said, uncomfortably. "He knows."

Mrs. Vanetzki sighed, pressed a hand against her own perspiring cheek, and rocked slightly from side to side. She was in touch with what time was to bring to her, Clement thought, and he was moved by this transcendency in her nature, even if it was excessively tragic for his taste.

"What are you going to do for a living? Because I can tell you now she will never amount to anything financially."

"Mama!" Lena protested, delighted by the implied female revolt in her mother's candor. "Oh, Mama, I'm not that bad!"

"Oh, you're getting there," Mrs. Vanetzki said. She repeated her question to Clement. "What are you going to live on?"

"Well, I don't know yet."

"Yet? Don't you know that every day costs money? 'Yet'? Economics does not wait for 'yet.' You have to know what you are going to live on. But I see you are like her—the world is not real to you, either. Isn't there something in Shakespeare about this?"

"Shakespeare?" Clement asked.

"You tell me everything is in Shakespeare. Tell me how a hopeless beautiful girl's supposed to marry a poet who hasn't got a job. My God, you are regular children!" And she laughed, shaking her head helplessly. Clement and Lena, relieved that she was no longer judging them, joined her, delighted that she was sharing their dilemma in this crazy life.

"But it's not going to happen right away, Mother. I've got to graduate first, and then if I can get a job . . ."

"She'll get a job—she's got perfect grades," Clement said, with complete confidence.

"What about you? Is there a job for poets? Why don't you try to be famous? Is there a famous poet in America?"

"Sure, there are famous American poets, but you probably wouldn't have heard of them."

"That's what you call famous, people that nobody's ever heard of?"

"They're famous among other poets and people interested in poetry."

"Write some kind of story—then you'll be famous. Not this poetry. Then maybe they'd make a moving picture out of your story."

"That's not the kind of writing he does, Mama."

"I know, you don't have to tell me that."

Patsy appeared behind the screen door in her bra and panties. "Ma, you seen my other bra?" She sounded persecuted.

"Hangin' up in the bathroom. Why don't you look sometime instead of 'Ma, Ma, Ma'?"

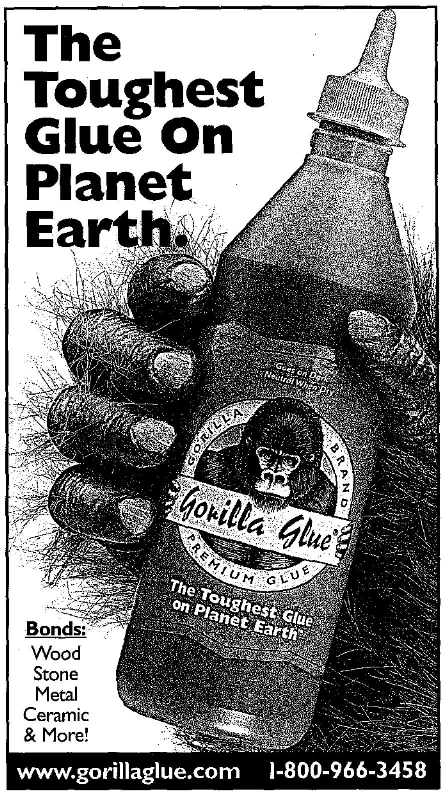
"I did look."

"Well, look again with your eyes open. And when you goin' to wash your own stuff?"

Patsy opened the screen door and came out barefoot on the porch, her arms crossed over her big breasts in deference to Clement. A towel was wrapped like a turban over her wet hair. In the fading daylight, he saw grandeur in her powerful thighs and her broad back and deep chest. On an impulse Patsy grasped her mother's face between her hands and kissed her. "I love you, Mama!"

"There's a man here and you walking around naked like that? Go inside, you crazy thing!"

"It's only Clement. Clement don't mind!" She turned her back on her mother and sister and faced Clement, whose heart swelled at the sight of her outthrust breasts, barely cupped by the undersized bra. With her taunt-



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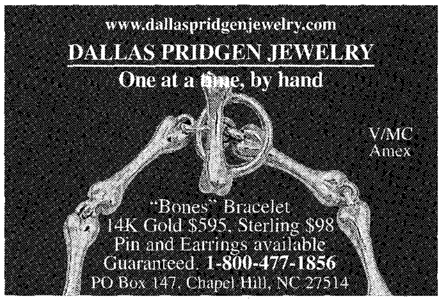

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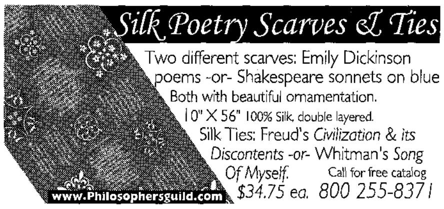

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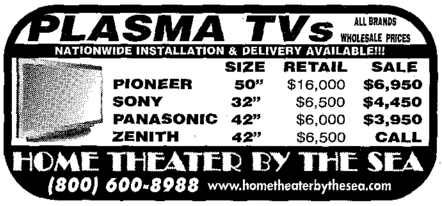

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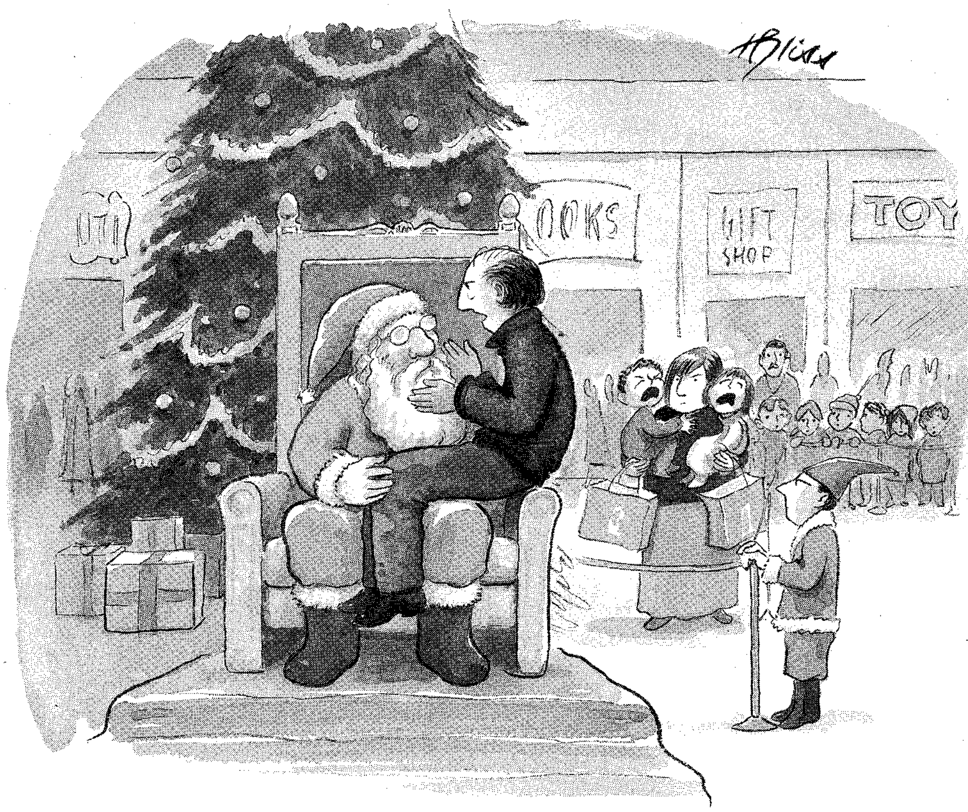


"And don't forget—make it look like an accident."

ing whine of a laugh, she asked, "You mind me, Clement?"

"No, I don't mind."

Mrs. Vanetzki leaned forward and smacked her daughter's ass hard with the flat of her hand and then laughed.

"Ow! You hurt me!" Patsy ran into the house, gripping her buttock.

It was almost dark now. A freight train clanked along in the near distance. Lena lit a cigarette and leaned back into the glider cushion.

"He's going to write a play for the stage, Ma."

"Him?"

"He can do it."

"That's good," Mrs. Vanetzki said, as if it were a joke. Before her black mood of disbelief, everyone fell silent.

Later, they went for a walk. It was a neighborhood of bungalows and four-story wooden apartment houses, workers' homes.

"She's right, I guess," Clement said, hoping Lena would contradict him.

"About getting married?"

"It'd be silly for us."

"Probably," she agreed, relieved. A decision decisively put off was as comforting as one that had been made, and she grasped his hand, lifted by this concretizing of the indefinite.

He could not get up the courage to place the ad. He was beginning to wonder if it might be thought perverse. But it gradually loomed like a duty to himself. One day, he picked up a copy of the *Village Voice* and stood on the corner of Prince and Broadway perusing the personal columns: page after page of randy invitations, pleas for a companion, offers of psychic discovery and physical improvement—like an ice field, he thought, with human voices calling for rescue from deep crevasses. Dante. He took the paper home to his barren desk, trying to think of some strategy, and finally decided on a direct approach: "Large woman wanted for harmless experiment, age immaterial but skin must be firm. Photos."

After five false starts—immensely blubbery nude women photographed from either end—he knew the moment he saw the photo that Carol Mundt was perfect: head thrown back as if in a laughing fit. When she appeared at his door—in her yellow miniskirt and white beret and black blouse, six inches taller than he, and touching in a corny way with that shy, brave grin—he wanted to throw his arms around her, instantly certain that she was going to validate his concept. At last he had done something about his emptiness.

Snuggling into his armchair, she made a desultory attempt to draw down her skirt while trying to look skeptically game, as if they were strangers at a bar. She jingled the heavy bracelets and chains around her neck, and neighed—horse laughter, irritating his sensitive hearing. In fact, there was something virginal about her that she might be working to cover up, maybe extra-virginal, like the best olive oil, a line he resolved to remember to use sometime. "So what's this about? Or am I wide enough?" she asked.

"It's very simple. I'm a novelist."

"Ah-huh." She nodded doubtfully.

He took down one of his books from the shelf and handed it to her. She glanced at his photo on the dust jacket, and her suspicions collapsed. "Well, now, say . . ."

"You will have to be naked, of course."

"Ah-huh." She seemed excited, as if steeling herself for the challenge.

He pressed on. "And I want to be able to write anywhere on you, because, you see, the story I have in mind will need all your space. Although I could be overestimating. I'm not sure yet, but it might be the first chapter of a novel." Then he explained about his block and his hope that writing on her skin would deliver him from its grip. Her eyes widened with fascination and sympathy, and he saw that she was proud to be his confidante. "It may not work—I don't know . . ."

"Well, it's worth a try, right? I mean, if you don't try you don't fly."

Vamping for time, he moved a small box of paper clips off his desk and a leather-bordered blotter, a long-ago

Christmas present from Lena. How to tell her to undress? The madness of the scheme came roaring at him like a wave, threatening to fling him back into his impotence. Scrambling, he said, "Undress, please?"—something he had never actually dared say to a woman, at least not standing up. With what seemed a mere shrug and a wriggle, she was standing before him naked but for her white panties. His eye went down to them and she asked, "Panties?"

"Well, if you don't mind, could you? It's kind of less—I don't know—stimulating with them off, you know? And I want to use that area."

She slid out of her panties and sat on the desk. "Which way?" she asked. Clearly, she had been having compunctions and now in overcoming them had been left in uncertainty, a mental state he practically owned. And so their familiarity deepened.

"On your stomach first. Would you like a sheet?"

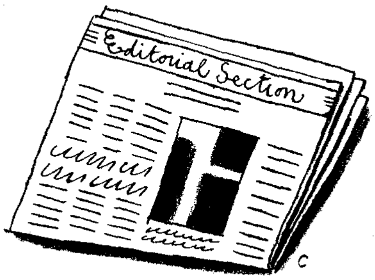
"This is all right," she said, and lowered herself onto the desktop. The broad expanse of her tanned back and global white buttocks was in violent contrast, it seemed now, to his desk's former devastated dryness. An engraved silver urn, one of his old prizes, held a dozen felt-tipped pens, one of which he now took in hand. Something in him was quivering with fear. What was he doing? Had he finally lost his mind?

"You O.K.?" she asked.

"Yes! I'm just thinking."

There had been a story—it was months ago now, maybe a year—which he had begun several times. Then, suddenly and simply, it occurred to him that he had outlived his gift and he had no belief in himself anymore. And now, with this waiting flesh under his hand, he had committed himself to believe again.

"You sure you're O.K.?" she repeated.



It hadn't been a great story, or even a very good one, but it held the image of how he had first met his wife, under a wave that had knocked them both down and sent them tumbling together toward the beach. As he got to his feet, yanking up his nearly stripped-away trunks while she staggered up as well, pulling her tank suit up over a breast that had popped out in the churning water, he saw them as fated, like Greeks rising from the ocean in some myth of drowning and being reborn.

He was a naïve poet then, and she worshipped Emily Dickinson and burning the candle at both ends. "The sea tried to strip you," he said. "The Minotaur." Her eyes, he saw, were glazed, which pleased him, for he was reassured by vague people, as it soon turned out that she was. Disgorged by the sea—as he saw the scene for years afterward—they instinctively glimpsed in each other the same anguish, the same desire to escape the definite. "Death by the Definite," he would write, a paean to the fog as creative force.

Now, holding the black felt-tipped pen in his right hand, he lowered his left onto Carol's shoulder. The warmth of her firm skin was a shock. Not often had his fantasy turned real, and that she was willing to do this for him, a stranger, threatened tears. The goodness of humanity. He had sensed that she had needed all her courage to respond to his ad, but something kept him from inquiring too deeply about her life. As long as she wasn't crazy. A little weird, maybe, but who wasn't? "Thank you, Carol."

"It's O.K. Take your time."

He felt himself beginning to swell. The way it used to happen long, long ago when he wrote. A man wrote with it, his aptly named organ, and a gallon of extra blood seemed to expand his veins. He leaned over Carol's back, his left hand pressing down more confidently on her shoulder now, and slowly wrote: "The wave gathered itself higher and higher far out where the sand shelf dropped down into the depths as the man and the woman tried to swim against the undertow that was sweeping them, strangers to each other, out toward their fate." Astonished, he saw with clarity fragments of days of his youth and young manhood, and, arcing over them like a rainbow, his unquestioning faith in life and

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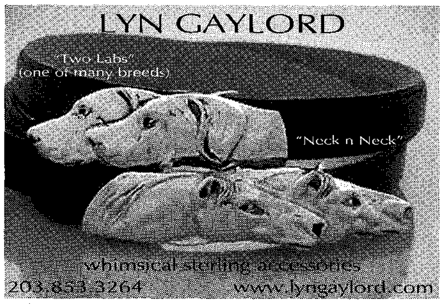

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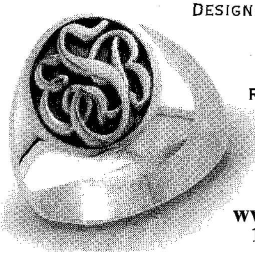

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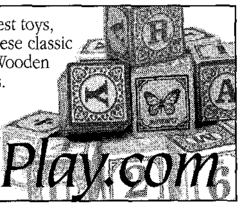

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its all but forgotten promise. He could smell Carol's flesh as she responded to the pressure of his hand, a green-tinted fecund sea scent that somehow taunted him with his desiccated strength. How to describe the sheer aching he felt in his heart?

And Lena's face rose before him as she had looked more than twenty years before, her eyes slightly bloodshot from the salt water, her swirling blond hair plastered across her laughing face, the fullness of her young body as she stepped upward across the sand and collapsed breathlessly laughing, and himself already in love with her form and both of them somehow familiar and unwary after their shared battering. It seemed that these were the first images he'd experienced in many years, and his pen moved down Carol's back to her buttocks and then down her left thigh and then the right, and, turning her over, it continued onto her chest and belly and then back down her thighs and onto her ankle, where, miraculously, the story, barely disguised, of his first betrayal of his wife came to its graceful end. He felt he had miraculously committed truth to this woman's flesh. But was it a story or the beginning of a novel? Oddly, it didn't matter, but he must show it to his editor right away.

"I finished on your ankle!" he called, surprised by a boyishness in the tone of his voice.

"Isn't that great! Now what?" She sat up, hands childishly spread out in the air so as not to smudge herself.

It struck him how strange it was that she was as ignorant of what had been written on her as a sheet of paper. "I could get you scanned, but I don't have a scanner. Otherwise, I could copy it on my laptop, but it'll take a while—I'm not a fast typist. I just hadn't thought of this . . . Unless I put you in a cab to my publisher," he joked. "But I'm only kidding. He might want some cuts."

They solved the problem by him standing behind her reading her back aloud while she sat typing on his laptop. They burst into laughter at the procedure from time to time. For the text on her front, she thought of having a full-length mirror to read from, but it would all be reversed. So he sat down in front of her and typed while she held the machine on her lap. When he had read down to her thighs, she had to stand so he could continue—until he was on the floor reading her calves and ankles.

Then he stood up and they looked deeply into each other's eyes for the first time. Then, possibly because they had done something so intimate, and so unthought of, they had no idea what to do next, and started to giggle and then collapsed from laughing, an infectious hysteria heaving their diaphragms until they had to lean their foreheads on the edge of the desk and not look at one another. Finally, he was able to say, "You're welcome to shower, if you like." And this for some reason rendered them screeching again, falling around with delicious helplessness.

Gasping, they slid to the floor and their laughter subsided. They lay side by side, filled with some unexpected childish knowledge of one another. Now they were quiet, still panting, lying face to face on his Oriental carpet.

"I guess I'll go, right?" she asked.

"How will you wash it off?" he asked, feeling an incomprehensible anxiety.

"Take a bath, I guess."

"But your back . . ."

"I know somebody who'll wash it."

"Who, a man?"

"No, a girl down the hall."

"But I'd rather nobody read it yet. I'm not really sure it's ready to publish, you know? Or for somebody to read it. I mean . . ." He was lurching about, looking for some reason to fend off the curiosity of this unknown back-washing girlfriend; or perhaps it was to preserve the privacy of his creation—God knew why, but he felt her body was still too personal for any stranger to look at. He raised himself up on one elbow. Her hair had spread out over the carpet. It was almost as if they had made love. "I can't let you out this way," he said.

"What do you mean?" There was a hopeful note in her voice.

"People who know us will recognize things about my wife in it. I'm not ready for that."

"Why'd you write it, then?"

"I just put it down raw and then I'd change some of it later. You can't go this way. I'll take a shower with you and scrub your back, O.K.?"

"O.K., sure. But I didn't intend for anybody to read it," she said.

"I know, but I'll feel better if it's gone."

In the small metal shower stall, she seemed so immense that he started to tire after scrubbing her for a few minutes with his back brush. Carol washed her front, but he did the backs of her thighs, calves, and ankles. And when she was clean, the water coursing down over her shoulders, he drew her to him. There was solid power in her body.

"Feeling better now?" she asked. He went abstract before this woman, the last vestiges of his brain slipping out of his skull and down into his groin.

Later, he wondered why making love to her under the stream of water was so easy and straightforward, while earlier, covered as she was with his words, the very thought of it was like penetrating thick brush and thorns. He wished he could have discussed this riddle with Lena. But of course that was out of the question, although he was not convinced it should be.

After he had helped dry Carol off, she slipped into her panties, bra, and blouse and yanked up her skirt while he sat at the desk and opened a drawer and took out a checkbook. But she immediately touched his wrist.

"It's all right," she said. Her damp hair bespoke their intimacy, the fact that he had changed her.

"But I want to pay you."

"Not this time." An open shyness passed over her face at this perhaps unintended suggestion of her wish to return. "Maybe next time, if you want me again." And then she seemed alarmed by a new thought. "Or will you? I mean, you've done it, right?" Her earlier brashness was returning. "I guess you can't have a first time twice, right?" She laughed softly, but her eyes were imploring.

He stood up and moved in to kiss her goodbye, but she turned away slightly and he landed on her cheek. "I guess you're right," he said.

A certain hardness surfaced in her face now. "Then, look, maybe I'd better take the money."

"Right," he said. Reality is always such a relief, he thought, but why must it come with anger? He sat down and wrote a check and, with a twinge of shame, handed it to her.

She folded the check and stuck it in her purse. "This has been quite a day, hasn't it!" she yelled, and let out one of her horse laughs, startling him, for she had left off laughing like that since their initial moments as strangers. She's gone back to hunting deer now, he thought, and slogging through the tundra. After peeking out of concealment for a self-confident moment, she had scurried back in.

With Carol gone, he sat at his desk with his manuscript before him. Eighteen pages. His unfocussed stare, his freshly washed body and spent force seemed to clarify and elevate him. He laid his palm on the pile of paper, thinking, I have dipped my toe over sanity's edge, so this had better be good. He rubbed his eyes and began to read his story when from far down below he heard the front door slam shut. Lena was home. Home with her face deeply wrinkled like a desiccated overripe pepper, her mouth drawn down, her breasts flat, the hateful brown nicotine smell on her breath. He was getting angry again, filling up with hate for her stubborn self-destruction.

Turning to his story, reading and rereading it, he felt a terrible amazement that its sweet flood of sympathy and love for her was thriving in him even now, almost as though a very young and unmarked man had written it, a man imprisoned inside him, a free-singing poet whose spirit was as real and convincing as the waves of the sea. What if he tried to turn the story into a kind of paean to her as she once had been—would she recognize herself and be reconciled? As he read, he saw how perfectly beautiful and poetic she still was in some buried center of his mind, and remembered how merely waking with her in the mornings had once filled him with happiness and purpose. Looking up from the manuscript to stare out across the barren rooftops, he felt a pang for Carol, whose brutally young presence was still vibrating in the room, and he wanted her to return maybe one more time so that he could write on her tight skin again and perhaps dredge up some other innocent thing that might be shivering in the darkness inside him, some remnant of love so terrified of coming out that it seemed to have disappeared—taking with it his art. ♦

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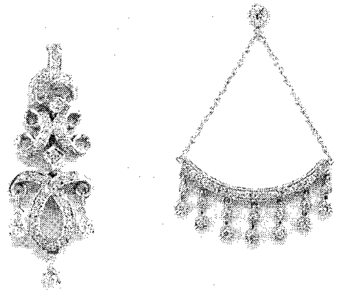

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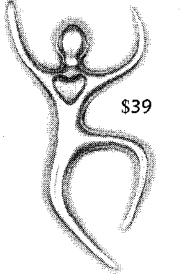

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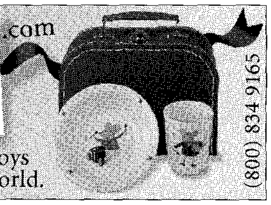

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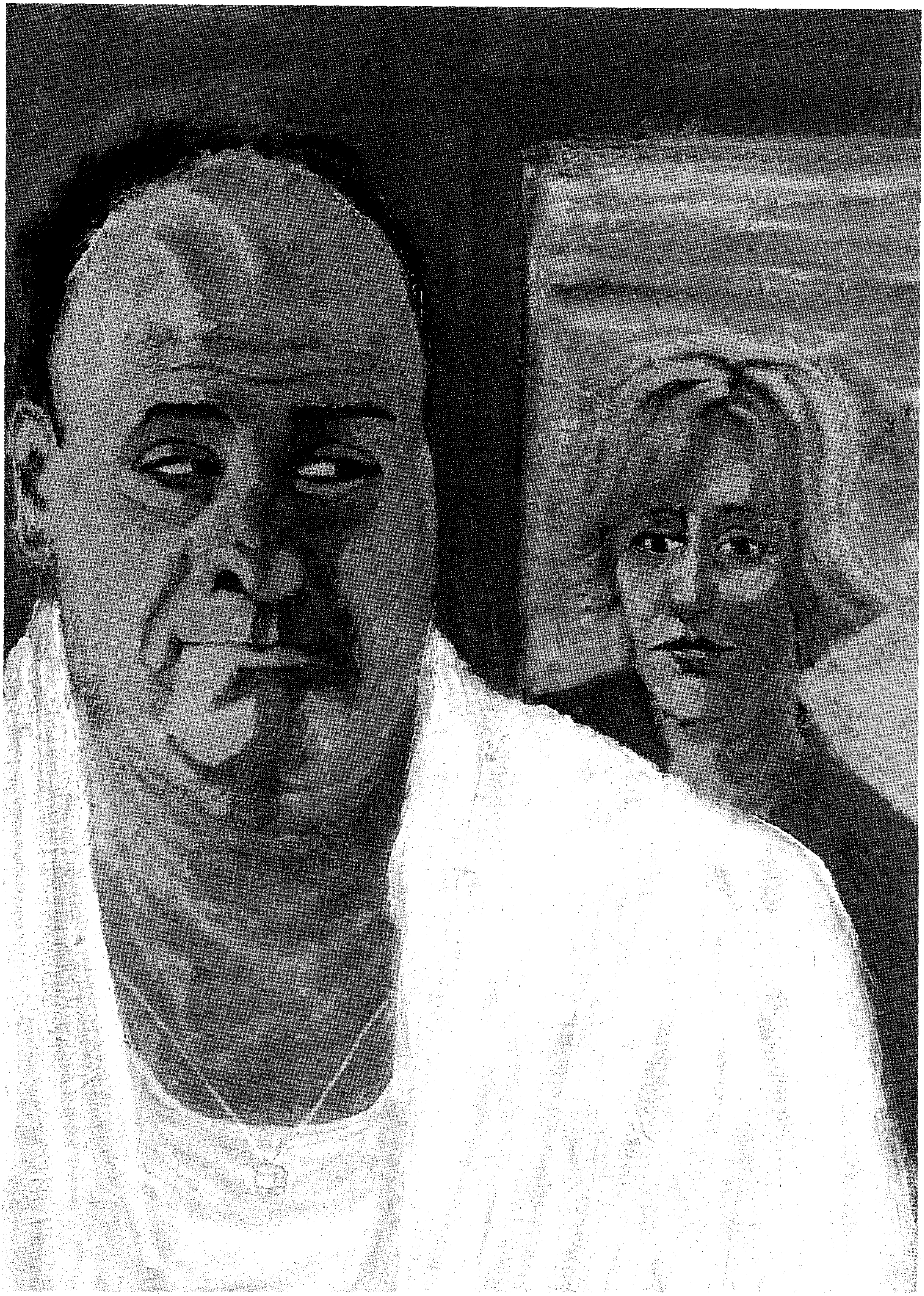
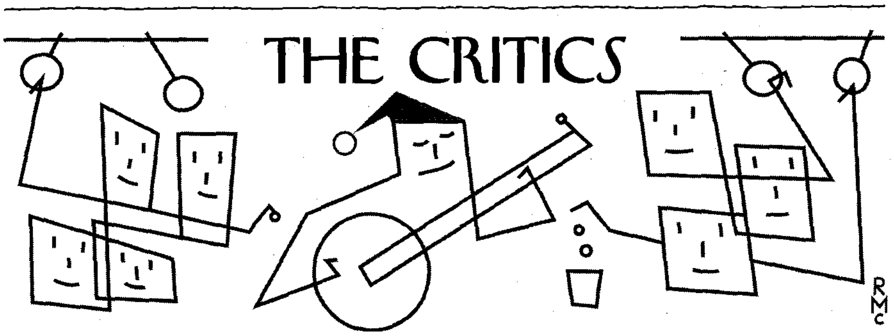


Tony Soprano's world is a man's world, but the characters that bore the closest watching this season were the women.

THE CRITICS



ON TELEVISION

SHOCK TREATMENT

Another season with "The Sopranos."

BY NANCY FRANKLIN

At the beginning of the first episode of "The Sopranos," back in 1999, Tony Soprano (James Gandolfini) sat in a psychiatrist's waiting room, about to embark on what would be a transformative journey—not so much for Tony but for TV viewers. The series has penetrated the culture to a degree that no one could have predicted (certainly not all the network executives who passed on it when David Chase, the show's creator, pitched it to them). The first three seasons are out on DVD and have brought in more than seventy million dollars; some dozen "Sopranos" books have been published (a cookbook, a psychological study, a collection of essays by Italian-Americans, a selection of scripts), and in September the first episode of the season that just ended drew a larger audience than any HBO show ever. To all the jokey marketing (a cookbook?) and publicity about the show (each time a cast member sneezes, there are eighteen *Times* articles about it), we may say "*Basta!*," but the show itself continues to pull us in; our marriage to this mob is one of such devotion that we even put up with a sixteen-month hiatus between the last two seasons. Though there is another season to come, sometime this millennium, in at least one way the show has come full circle: in the third-to-last episode of this season, Tony quit therapy.

Tony's relationship with Dr. Melfi (Lorraine Bracco), the psychiatrist, has been central to the show—the fact that he sought help for his panic attacks and depression raised the interesting question of whether a brutal killer was treatable, or capable of change. But it has been some time since he has, as they say, done any therapeutic work. It's been fascinating to watch him sitting in the chair in Dr. Melfi's office week after week, partly because to an extraordinary degree the therapy has been depicted realistically: the silences, the misunderstandings, the transference and countertransference, the boring stretches where nothing seems to be happening—they're all there. Bracco's Dr. Melfi isn't necessarily the best shrink in the world, but Bracco is so convincing (last year, she received an award from the American Psychoanalytic Association for creating "the most credible psychoanalyst ever to appear in the cinema or on television," which just goes to show that even analysts are prey to their own fantasies, since Bracco plays a psychiatrist, not a psychoanalyst) that it's unsettling to think of her playing the part of Mrs. Robinson in "The Graduate," as she is now doing on Broadway, a role that calls for a few seconds of nudity. It's one thing to wonder what your shrink looks like naked, but actually seeing her naked comes under the heading of Too Much Information.

I expect that Tony will be back in Dr. Melfi's office for a tune-up down the road, but, barring some crisis involving his family—his wife, Carmela (Edie Falco), or his children, Meadow and A.J. (Jamie-Lynn Sigler and Robert Iler)—he's probably gone as far he can go. He has been shaken and stirred but not denatured; he's still the same dangerous cocktail he was four years ago. When Dr. Melfi tries to persuade him to stay in treatment—now that his clinical symptoms have been dealt with, she tells him, "the real work can begin"—Tony says disgustedly, "Come on, I'm a fat fucking crook from New Jersey." This is the truth of the matter; if it isn't the whole truth, it might as well be. Even if he is a loving father, Tony's entire life is built on lies and betrayal. (And this season we saw that he cares more about dead animals than he does about many living people.) If anything, he has only become better at lying: when Dr. Melfi asks Tony whether someone who appeared in a dream of his has changed recently, he says no. Well, as it happens, everything has changed for that character: he was alive, and now he's dead—Tony bashed his head in a few days earlier. Far from being disappointing, Tony's inability, or unwillingness, to reform is one of the things that have kept the show fresh; like most of us, he has more self-awareness than he is able to use ("All this fucking self-knowledge. What the fuck has it gotten me?"), and his behavior reflects his preference for eliminating conflict rather than resolving it. Talking things out may have its place, but sometimes only a good whack job will do.

Tony's world is a man's world, but the characters that bore the closest watching this season were the women, particularly Carmela, who is an alloy of disappointment and tensile maternal steel. (Dr. Melfi had her moment in the third season, during a harrowing episode in which she was raped in a parking-garage stairwell; afterward, she had to wrestle with her impulse to tell Tony about it, knowing that he would avenge her in a way that would be satisfying on a primal, if not legal, level.) No one has replaced, or could replace, the late Nancy Marchand, who, as Tony's mother, embodied evil narcissism to such an extent that she conspired to kill her own son—though late in this season we saw the myth of saintly motherhood punctured again, as Paulie (Tony Sirico), the consummate mama's boy cum psychopath, put his whiny mother in a nursing home, just as Tony had done. The scenes showing the petty cruelty and cliquishness of

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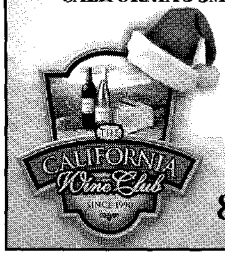
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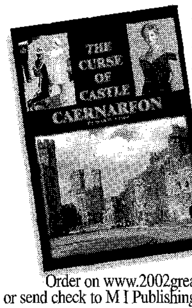

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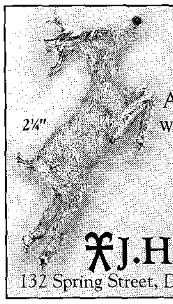


the old bats and Paulie's efforts to help his mother fit in to a place that's "like high school with wheelchairs," as the administrator puts it, are hilarious, until the humor turns into ugly violence (as it almost always does with Paulie, whose angry comic flair is only one notch on the dial away from his murderousness).

In the third season, Carmela herself saw a shrink, who gave her the disturbing information that she had choices in her life—that she could, and should, leave Tony. "One thing you can never say is that you haven't been told," he said. Overwhelmed by her own complicity in Tony's life style—she is, after all, the one who cooks and serves the bacon that Tony brings home—she got under the covers, where we find her again toward the end of this season, overwhelmed by jealousy of her daughter, who has become an independent-minded college student and is happily in love. Carmela has fallen in love, too, with one of her husband's henchmen, a shy Neapolitan with a sensitive ponytail (and a remorseless efficiency at killing people), who, knowing he'd have to off his boss in order to have Carmela, flees to the Old Country, taking the fantasy that has sustained Carmela with him. It remains to be seen whether she will get to the crossroads she has been approaching or whether she will keep pulling over to the side of the road and going to sleep. She has a ways to go: when her would-be lover tells her, as she is helping him turn his garage into an apartment for his mother, that she is a very special woman, she pauses, weighing her response, then says, "Have you thought about flooring yet?"

Carmela does have her eye on the big picture; at the beginning of the season's first episode, we see her reading the *Times*, while Tony waddles up the driveway, in an open bathrobe, flipping through the Newark *Star-Ledger* to find the sports section. In the first season, she invested in the stock market; now she is studying for her real-estate license. She's horrified, though, to see a friend of hers handing out food samples in the supermarket, and she confronts Tony about finances and the future. "You'll be taken care of," he says. (But he tells his uncle that he has cash-flow problems, and yells at his capos for not bringing in enough money.) "Everything comes to an end," Carmela warns him. Disgusted by the evidence of another one of Tony's sexual betrayals, she begins stealing from him and investing the money. But by the end of this season she's in retreat again, in her bed, watching "How to Marry a Millionaire" on TV.

Money and TV. These two ingredients seemed even more pervasive in this season than in others, as symbols of lives not well lived. Tony's uncle, on trial for corruption, watches "Who Wants to Be a Millionaire"; the Neapolitan watches Bloomberg; people get legal "information" from police dramas; Tony's nephew, Christopher (Michael Imperioli), shoots up while "The Little Rascals" cavort in the background and watches "Magnum, P.I." during a hit at the victim's house; Tony hangs around at home during the day, eating a big bowl of ice cream and watching Dean Martin in "Rio Bravo"; and Tony and Christopher sit and watch an old Elizabeth Taylor melodrama (while Tony eats peanut butter out of the jar with a knife) after Tony has just killed a guy for no good reason.

The life we see in "The Sopranos" is starting to seem not real-life-like but smaller than life—so many possibilities have gone unrealized or been snuffed out. So much waste, so little waste management. Tony lamented at the beginning of the series that he got into this world as it was winding down and standards and loyalty had collapsed. His brainstorm this season was that from now on he would trust only blood relations, like the smack-addled Christopher. He says to him, "You got your whole life in front of you, Christopher. You throw it away on drugs?" Good point—except that he says it as they're walking to the edge of a ravine to dump a dead body. And Christopher will never have Tony's stature; the contradictions in his character are of no interest. (There aren't many, in any case; he's pretty much just a short-fused jerk.) Tony's thinking goes like this: "There's two endings for a guy like me, a high-profile guy: dead or in the can. . . . There's a third way to wrap it up: you rely only on family." There's a fourth way, too, which Tony would appreciate; everything may come to an end, as Carmela says, but, no matter what happens to Tony, he will live on in the land of old movies and reruns. ◆

BOOKS

THE LOST

Searching for Bruno Schulz.

BY RUTH FRANKLIN

Schulz's output, though small, dazzled contemporaries by its originality.

JEWISH HISTORICAL INSTITUTE, WARSAW

In 1941, when the Germans seized the Polish town of Drohobycz, Felix Landau, the notorious Gestapo officer in charge of the Jewish labor force, took an interest in Bruno Schulz, a local writer and artist who had submitted samples of his work to the Judenrat in the hope of gaining employment. Landau had an eye for design—after the war, he went on to start an interior-decorating firm in Bavaria—and he commissioned a number of works from Schulz, including a set of murals for his young son's bedroom depicting scenes from fairy tales. In return, Landau supplied Schulz with extra food and with protection that temporarily spared the artist's life. Ultimately, though, Landau's favors contributed to Schulz's death. In November, 1942, Landau killed a Jewish dentist favored by a rival Gestapo officer, Karl Günther. Soon after, on a day that has come to be known as Black Thursday, Günther saw his opportunity for revenge. That morning, a "wild action"—a spontaneous Gestapo shooting spree—broke out. Schulz was not at work but in the ghetto, perhaps getting food in preparation for an escape, which he had planned for that night. According to Schulz's friend Izydor Friedman, who witnessed his death, Günther caught up with Schulz at the corner of Czacki and Mickiewicz Streets and shot him twice in the head. "You killed my Jew—I killed yours," he later boasted to Landau.

After the war, Drohobycz became part of the Soviet Union, and bureaucratic difficulties made searching for the murals nearly impossible. In February, 2001, however, the German documentary filmmaker Benjamin Geissler went with a crew to Drohobycz, now part of Ukraine, to look for them. With the help of several residents of the town, they were able to gain access to Landau's house, which had been converted into apartments. There, in a tiny room being used as a pantry, they discovered the faint outlines of Schulz's paintings, hidden beneath a coat of whitewash. As they rubbed the walls, bright spots of color began to appear: Schulz's kings and queens and gnomes, released after their long period in hiding.

It is cause for celebration whenever a work of art thought to have been lost is found, but in the context of Schulz's life the discovery seemed like a miracle. At the time of his death, Schulz had published only two books of short stories, "Cinnamon Shops" (which appeared in English as "The Street of Crocodiles") and "Sanatorium Under the Sign of the Hourglass," and some illustrations and other graphic art works. These books have established him as one of the most original voices of European modernism. Schulz has been called a symbolist, an Expressionist, and a Surrealist, and compared to writers as different as Kafka and Proust. His work shares the former's fascination with metamorphosis and the latter's reverence for childhood, while embodying a radical sensuality that is unique. But it is hard to evaluate Schulz's work with confidence, because much of what he wrote, or may have written, has been lost. When he was forced to move to the Drohobycz ghetto, a year before his death, he divided up his papers, which are said to have included at least two unpublished manuscripts and hundreds of drawings, prints, and paintings, and entrusted them to a few non-Jewish friends for safekeeping. They have not been seen since.

Restoration work on the murals began immediately. The Ukrainian minister of culture announced that they would be put on the country's list of protected national monuments. Shortly afterward, three people representing Yad Vashem, the Holocaust museum in Jerusalem, came to the apartment and removed Schulz's paintings. Fragments "were pried from the walls hurriedly and crudely," leaving behind "mutilated remnants," Jerzy Ficowski writes in his biography of Schulz, "Regions of the Great Heresy" (Norton; $25.95), which has been newly translated by Theodosia Robertson. All of a sudden, Bruno Schulz became front-page news. "THEY STOLE SCHULZ," a headline in *Gazeta Wyborcza*, Poland's leading newspaper, announced. Dora Katznelson, a member of the Drohobycz Jewish community, wrote in a letter to the editor, "Not only Jews and Poles but Ukrainians as well, reading daily in the Ukrainian papers about the barbaric theft of Schulz's paintings, cry out in amazement: 'Yad Vashem? It can't be!' " After several days of silence, a Yad Vashem spokesperson claimed that the removal "was conducted with the full coöperation of the Drohobycz municipality," adding that, since Schulz was a Jew and had been killed by the Nazis, the museum could assert a "moral right" to the art work. Ficowski believes that such arguments "offend logic and common sense and invalidate the work of a generation of Polish intellectuals whose goal it has been to force a nation to come to grips with its past." He adds, "Despite local and world protest, a work of art was allowed to disappear."

The murals' disappearance, though, was strangely appropriate. Schulz's fiction is preoccupied with the attempt to locate things that have been lost, from an exquisite book, glimpsed in childhood and never seen again, to his own father, whose death is reënacted in many of the stories. Indeed, the idea of loss is a crucial aspect of Schulz's principal endeavor: to reconstruct the world of childhood, a world that the writer can approach only through memory and imagination. It is a phantasmagorical region in which mundane incidents—a nighttime walk, an encounter with a tramp—expand to take on a mystical dimension. "An event may be small and insignificant in its origin, and yet, when drawn close to one's eye, it may open in its center an infinite and radiant perspective because a higher order or being is trying to express itself in it and irradiates it violently," Schulz wrote. "Thus we shall collect these allusions, these earthly approximations, these stations and stages on the paths of our life, like the fragments of a broken mirror."

Schulz's biography, too, is a collection of fragments. Ficowski calls his book a "biographical portrait," but "sketch" would be more apt, since much about the writer's life is simply not known. Schulz was born on July 12, 1892, in Drohobycz, which was then part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. (The high school he attended was named after Franz Josef, but by the time he returned there as a teacher, in a newly independent Poland, it had been patriotically rechristened after the medieval Polish king Wladyslaw Jagiello.) Schulz grew up speaking both Polish and German. He started to draw as a very young child, long before his first attempts to write. "Before I could even speak," he told a friend, "I covered any piece of paper and the edges of newspapers with scribbles that caught the attention of those around me."

After graduating from high school, in 1910, Schulz went to Lwów, the provincial capital, to study architecture. His studies were interrupted by poor health—he suffered heart and lung ailments throughout his life—and with the outbreak of war in 1914 he had to abandon them. His father died the following year, and responsibility for the upkeep of the family, which included his widowed elder sister and her two children, fell in part to Schulz. In the first years after the war, he concentrated on his art, exhibiting his work in galleries in Lwów, Wilno, and Warsaw and assembling a collection of prints under the title "The Booke of Idolatry," which he bound and sold. Whether from embarrassment or modesty, he told the students who assisted him that the prints were illustrations of Leopold von Sacher-Masoch's "Venus in Furs." This gives a fair idea of their content—highly erotic, with a recurrent motif of men collapsed in worship at the feet of a long-legged nude woman. (When Schulz's art was displayed in a spa town where he periodically went to take the cure, a senator condemned it as pornography and threatened to have the exhibit shut down.) But he was unable to earn a living through art, and his family responsibilities weighed heavily. In 1924, he began teaching drawing and "handicrafts"—essentially, shop—at the high school in Drohobycz.

At about this time, Schulz began to write in earnest. While teaching, he would tell stories to get his rowdy students to calm down and pay attention. One former student recalled "those tales in which a pencil, an inconspicuous water jug, or a tile stove had their own histories and lived in a manner close to us and so much like human beings." As Schulz recounted the tales, he illustrated them "with a few strokes of chalk on the blackboard." He seems always to have done his best work before an audience, a tendency that made him an extraordi-

MARISA ACOCELLA

"Stop smiling. You're downtown."

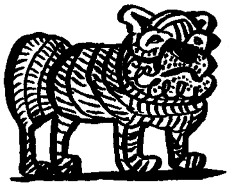
nary correspondent. In a series of letters to the poet Debora Vogel, he composed elaborate postscripts—long, descriptive passages based on episodes from his childhood. Vogel encouraged Schulz to turn his postscripts into a book, which eventually came to the attention of the novelist Zofia Nalkowska, an important figure in the Warsaw literary scene. After reading Schulz's manuscript, she proclaimed him "the most sensational discovery in our literature!" and promised to take his book to the publisher herself. "Cinnamon Shops" was published in 1934; "Sanatorium Under the Sign of the Hourglass" followed, three years later.

"The books we read in childhood don't exist anymore; they sailed off with the wind, leaving bare skeletons behind," Schulz wrote in a 1936 letter. "Whoever still has in him the memory and marrow of childhood should rewrite these books as he experienced them." This was the foundation of his creative project, and he realized it most vividly in a story called simply "The Book," which opens his second collection and may originally have been part of a novel, now lost. The story's narrator recalls a volume whose pages, when rubbed, reveal fragments of kaleidoscopic color:

> Sometimes my father would wander off and leave me alone with The Book; the wind would rustle through its pages and the pictures would rise. And as the windswept pages were turned, merging the colors and shapes, a shiver ran through the columns of text, freeing from among the letters flocks of swallows and larks. Page after page floated in the air and gently saturated the landscape with brightness. At other times, The Book lay still and the wind opened it softly like a huge cabbage rose; the petals, one by one, eyelid under eyelid, all blind, velvety, and dreamy, slowly disclosed a blue pupil, a colored peacock's heart, or a chattering nest of hummingbirds.

When, years later, the boy asks his father what happened to The Book, he is told that it is "a myth in which we believe when we are young, but which we cease to take seriously as we get older." One day, he finds some tattered pages that he believes were part of the treasured volume. Alas, all the text has been destroyed; only old advertisements remain. Yet even these rise "over the sphere of daily affairs into the region of pure poetry": an ad for canaries carries the sound of chirping birds, a procession of cripples yields to distant landscapes beyond. No image ever appears twice; the writing "unfolds while being read, its boundaries open to all currents and fluctuations." This book, the boy is certain, is "the Authentic," to which all books aspire. Without it, "they live only a borrowed life, which at the moment of inspiration returns to its ancient source."

All artists, Schulz believed, spend their lives interpreting images that are stamped in their minds during childhood. He wrote, "They do not discover anything new after that, they only learn how to understand better and better the secret entrusted to them at the outset; their creative effort goes into an unending exegesis, a commentary on that one couplet of poetry assigned to them." For Schulz, this "couplet" was the mythology of his early life—a "spiritual genealogy," he called it. The linked stories that make up his two collections are all narrated from the perspective of a young boy who is an apparent stand-in for the author. His father, the central figure of the stories, combines physical frailty with prodigious psychic power. In an illustration for "Sanatorium Under the Sign of the Hourglass," the father is bedridden, but his force manifests itself in an enlarged, bulbous forehead and in his hair, which sticks up in thick ropes. In the story "Tailors' Dummies," a mannequin inspires the father to imagine how man might be re-created in disposable form: "For each action, each word, we shall call to life a different human being." His son labels him a "Heresiarch," though this particular heresy is an attack not on religion but on the banality of life: the linear flow of hours and days, which Schulz's stories, with their magical transformations and moments outside time, seek to overcome.



"Reality is as thin as paper, and betrays with all its cracks its imitative character," Schulz wrote in one story. His fiction peers through those cracks. Familiar streets unexpectedly become labyrinths of hidden corners and strange courtyards; forgotten passageways become gateways to another, more vibrant world. In "Cinnamon Shops," the boy is sent to run an errand at night and becomes lost: "There open up, deep inside a city, reflected streets, streets which are double, make-believe streets. One's imagination, bewitched and misled, creates illusory maps of the apparently familiar districts, maps in which the streets have their proper places and usual names but are provided with new and fictitious configurations by the inexhaustible inventiveness of the night." In "Tailors' Dummies," the father recalls a surprising discovery he made upon entering a neglected room in an old apartment: "From all the crevices in the floor, from all the mouldings, from every recess, there grew slim shoots filling the grey air with a scintillating filigree lace of leaves: a hot-house jungle, full of whispers and flicking lights—a false and blissful spring." The vision vanishes almost as soon as it appears: "The whole elusive sight was a Fata Morgana, an example of the strange make-believe of matter which had created a semblance of life."

Like prose poems, the stories work not through conventional structures of plot or character but by building up a welter of images that create their own logic. Their anthropomorphism can be dizzying. "Now the windows, blinded by the glare of the empty square, had fallen asleep," Schulz writes in "August." "The balconies declared their emptiness to heaven; the open doorways smelt of coolness and wine." In "Birds," we are told, "The days hardened with cold and boredom like last year's loaves." Then Schulz prods the simile just a bit further than expected: "One began to cut them with blunt knives without appetite, with a lazy indifference." The sensuality that characterizes Schulz's language is rooted in the Polish poetic tradition, but the surreal and grotesque tweaks are his own.

Although Schulz's stories revel in the metaphysical, his letters reveal that he was preoccupied with mundanities. He found teaching burdensome, and fretted constantly about not being granted the leaves of absence that he requested. "Time to which someone else has laid claim, to which someone made the slightest allusion—is already tainted, ruined, inedible," he wrote in a 1934 letter. "When I have to prepare a lesson for the next day, buy materials at the lumberyard—the entire afternoon and evening are already ruined for me." He was also obsessed with the pettier details of a writer's career: reviews of his books (which were mixed), nominations for prizes (which he seldom received), foreign translations (which did not occur in his lifetime). He longed to escape his family, with whom he lived, and marry Józefina Szelińska, a Catholic schoolteacher to whom he became engaged in 1935, but he worried that his meagre income could not support two households. After two years, they broke off the engagement.

In addition to his financial concerns, Schulz was oppressed by fears of personal danger; in one of the biography's few personal details, Ficowski poignantly recounts that, when Schulz was anxious, to calm himself he would sketch the outline of a little house. If he found himself without a pencil, he would trace the shape with his finger. These worries, naturally, interfered with his writing. After he wrote the stories in his two published books, he never enjoyed another period of sustained productivity. For years, he labored over a novel, to be called "Messiah," in which the Jewish Messiah appears in Drohobycz. Except for a couple of stories published in Schulz's second book which may originally have been part of the novel, nothing of "Messiah" ever made its way into print. The romantic allure of this apparently lost masterpiece has inspired endless speculation and at least two novels, Cynthia Ozick's "The Messiah of Stockholm" and David Grossman's "See Under: Love." But, considering the slow pace of Schulz's progress, it seems fair to wonder how much of "Messiah" ever got written. "I am waiting for more free time in order to return to work on the novel 'Messiah,' " Schulz wrote in a 1935 letter. "My work progresses very slowly" was the next report. "I've not had good periods. Over vacation I couldn't write anything. Now when I could write—school." In 1937, the book was "still in its infancy."

In September, 1939, Germany invaded Poland. Just two weeks later, the Soviets took Drohobycz. Schulz was safer under the Soviets than he would have been under the Germans, but he suffered in the new political climate. He was unable to publish his written work, which clearly did not conform to the dictates of socialist realism, though he did earn money by painting portraits of officials, including Stalin. (When a Stalin portrait he had done for the Drohobycz town hall was destroyed by jackdaws, Schulz is said to have told a friend that the loss of his own work actually brought him satisfaction.) This relative reprieve did not last long. The Germans retook Drohobycz in June, 1941, during Operation Barbarossa, and Schulz was forced to give up his home and move to the ghetto. Ironically, this may have galvanized his art. Ficowski reports that ten days before his death Schulz told an acquaintance that he was collecting material for a work about "the most awful martyrdom in history." Already, he said, he had amassed a hundred pages of notes.

These notes, like the rest of Schulz's manuscripts, have never been found. The search for the writer's papers has been Ficowski's lifelong occupation, and he has pursued it with a fervor that sometimes looks like mania. "For a half-century I have lived in expectation, believing and not believing by turns that I will see it in the end," he writes of "Messiah." Described as Schulz's "chronicler and archeologist," Ficowski has acted as the writer's agent, producing numerous editions of his stories, letters, and drawings and getting them published in Poland and abroad. He has also served as a one-man literary detective agency, placing advertisements in Polish and Ukrainian newspapers imploring the people to whom Schulz entrusted his work to make themselves known, and attempting to track down every living correspondent of Schulz's in the effort to find any remaining letters or other papers, no matter how insignificant.

At times, Ficowski seems to have come excruciatingly close to the jackpot. In 1987, a man named Alex Schulz, who claimed to be the writer's cousin, contacted him to say that a man from Lwów, possibly a diplomat or a K.G.B. official, had offered to sell him a package of Schulz's manuscripts and drawings weighing two kilograms. Ficowski readily agreed to verify the authenticity of the documents; months passed; and then Alex Schulz died of a brain hemorrhage, leaving Ficowski with no way to contact the mysterious man from Lwów. Several years later, he met the Swedish ambassador to Warsaw, who told him that a "bulging packet" containing Schulz's manuscripts, "with the novel 'Messiah' at the top," was hidden in the K.G.B. archives. The ambassador had learned about this from a "Russian" who had come upon the packet by accident, hidden under the name of an unknown Pole, presumably one of those to whom Schulz had given his papers. He asked Ficowski to accompany him to Ukraine to look for it, but the authorities twice denied the ambassador a visa, and he, too, died before the quest could be completed.

Amid these spy-novel machinations, one begins to wonder whether Ficowski could have been the object of a terrible joke—the bulging packet with "Messiah" at the top sounds too good to be true. And the fact that fifty years of searching have turned up only about a hundred letters might well be evidence that nothing else ever existed. Still, the chapters in which Ficowski writes autobiographically about his quest are the most engaging in his book. And the frustration of the ongoing search for Schulz's traces explains the magnitude of the excitement when the Drohobycz wall paintings were found, and the disappointment that ensued when they vanished. For local devotees of Schulz, the removal of the murals was deeply wounding. A national treasure had been lost and, it was claimed, the force required to remove the murals from the walls could have damaged them irrevocably.

Yet the events in that Drohobycz apartment have a certain chilly logic. For Schulz's stories suggest that, like the childhood episodes he reimagines, works of art, too, have an inherent ephemerality, vanishing almost as soon as they are experienced. The Book, the mysterious landscape of "Cinnamon Shops," the Fata Morgana in the empty room—all are momentary creations of the imagination, glimpses through a crack that is already closing. They exist for just one glorious instant, made all the more beautiful by the impossibility of their reconstruction. Schulz, in one story, compared books to meteors. "Each of them has only one moment, a moment when it soars screaming like the phoenix, all its pages aflame," he wrote. "For that single moment we love them ever after, although they soon turn to ashes." ♦

BRIEFLY NOTED

Down by the River: Drugs, Money, Murder, and Family, *by Charles Bowden (Simon & Schuster; $27).* This brutal and brilliantly reported account of life in the drug trade on the Mexican-American border turns the story of one El Paso family into an excavation of the relationship between commerce and corruption. For Bowden, Mexico is a place where narcotics money can buy anything, including access to the highest reaches of government, and where the flow of drugs is one of the only things keeping the economy afloat, while America—with its insatiable demand and its ready cash—is the engine that keeps the system running. Bowden has never met a conspiracy theory he didn't like, and his overwrought prose has a paranoid air, substituting loosely connected assertions for coherent argument. But his characters—including a D.E.A. agent who has gone off the rails and a drug lord who suddenly finds himself dispensable—are remarkably vivid, and he captures the way greed, ethnicity, and an old-school emphasis on honor interact to create a world in which violence is the only constant.

Love at Goon Park: Harry Harlow and the Science of Affection, *by Deborah Blum (Perseus; $26).* The psychologist Harry Harlow tried to get the rather cruel science of his time to catch up, as he put it, with common sense. Readers may have seen the newsmaking pictures of Harlow's experiments in the nineteen-fifties, which demonstrated that parents are not seen by their offspring as mere food sources: baby monkeys cling to terrycloth surrogate mothers, shunning the cold wire ones that hold milk. Harlow's conclusions dovetailed with the previously much-maligned ideas of the British psychiatrist John Bowlby. Together, they led to the acceptance of attachment theory, which has had a profound influence on child-rearing. The story of Harlow, a combative and morally ambiguous figure, makes for lively reading—the kind that has you rethinking everything from your analyst to your mother—but one also wishes that the Pulitzer-winning author had a gift for fusing the larger concepts with character, and a more stringent way with prose.

Elmer McCurdy, *by Mark Svenvold (Basic; $25).* Elmer McCurdy was a failed plumber turned failed criminal who was shot dead by a posse in 1911, after bungling a train robbery. In life, McCurdy was a classic two-bit loser, but after his death he was suddenly glorified as a hard-riding outlaw, and his embalmed body was turned into a sideshow attraction. The tale of McCurdy's corpse becomes a lively, digressive history of the underside of American popular entertainment in the twentieth century, from carnivals to exploitation films. Avoiding a ponderous cultural-studies tone, Svenvold offers sharp reflections on the cult of the outlaw and the charms of hucksterism, while staying keenly attuned to the wonderful strangeness of a culture that could transform a corpse into a celebrity.

December 6, *by Martin Cruz Smith (Simon & Schuster; $26).* Smith's new thriller is set in Tokyo in the last days of 1941, just before the bombing of Pearl Harbor; its central character, the American Harry Niles, grew up in Japan, where his missionary parents were preaching the Word. Harry isn't very holy, however: he owns a night club called the Happy Paris, dabbles in assorted short cons, and spends much of his time with various mistresses, including the possibly murderous Michiko, the jukebox girl at the Happy Paris. As the rumors of war heat up, Harry finds that he is the victim of his own equivocal identity: Americans worry that he has become too Japanese, and the Japanese suspect him of being a spy. Smith's plot is more than slightly reminiscent of "Casablanca," and the spectre of the Second World War seems, at this distance, almost quaint, but the characters are so well drawn and the local color so colorful that these quibbles hardly interfere with the novel's pleasures.

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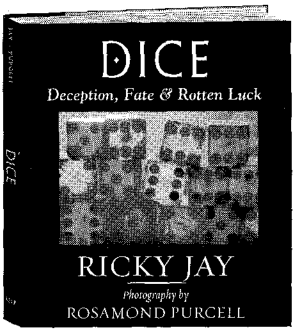

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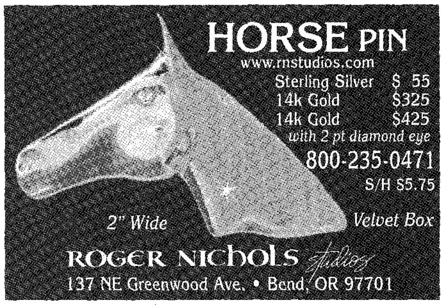

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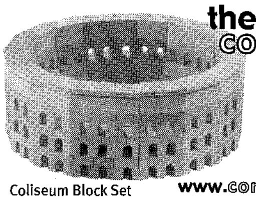

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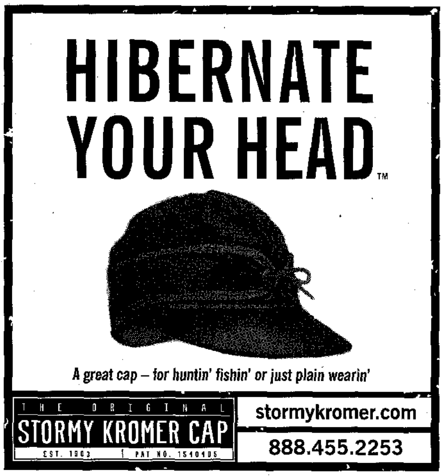
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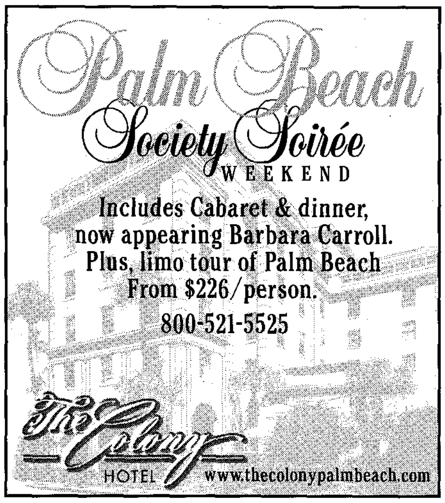
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MUSICAL EVENTS

OPERAPOLITIK

A Berlin diary.

BY ALEX ROSS

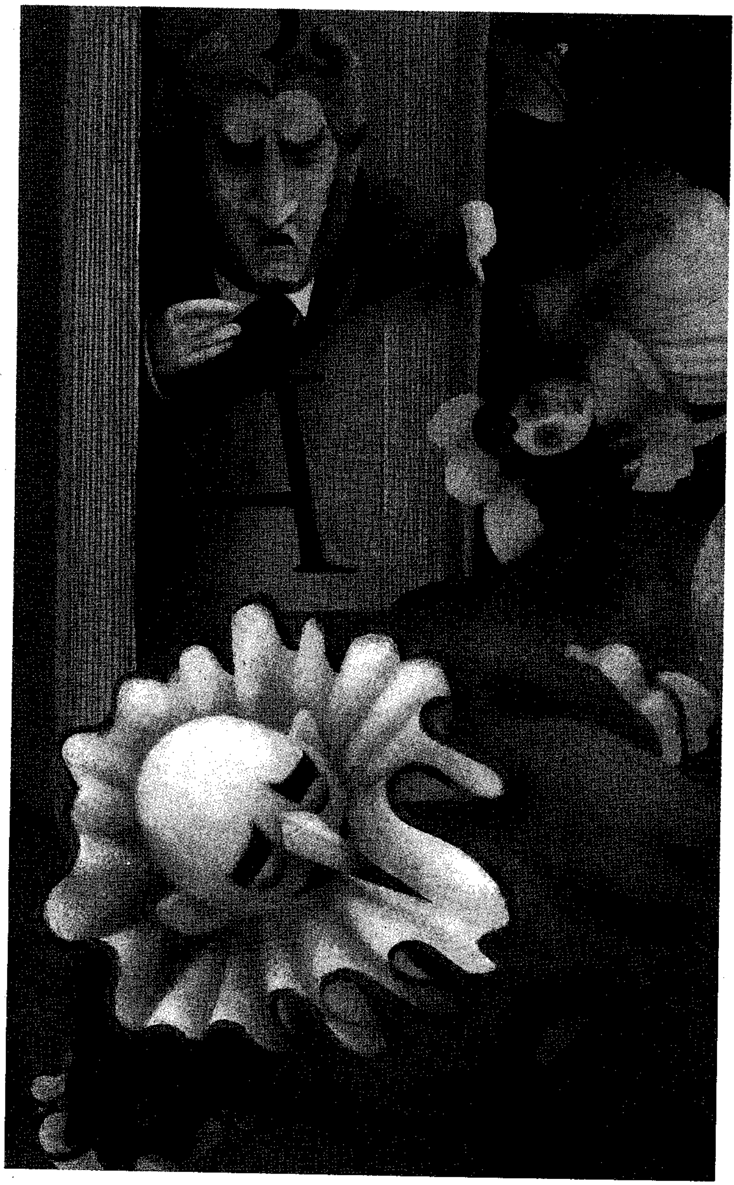
Only in Berlin would an argument over the future of three opera houses take on the dimensions of a constitutional crisis. Here is how things stand in the first days of December: the Social Democratic Party, which governs Germany with the Greens, supports a plan to unite the Staatsoper, on Unter den Linden, with the Deutsche Oper, in the west. Daniel Barenboim, the Staatsoper's music director, fiercely opposes the idea. The Christian Democratic Union, meanwhile, wants to put not only these two companies under one administration but also a third—the smaller-scale Komische Oper. Thomas Flierl, Berlin's cultural tsar, who belongs to the ex-communist Party for Democratic Socialism, has yet to commit himself one way or another. Berliners have lost all patience with this mess, but visiting Americans may be charmed by the fact that politicians here take an interest in opera at all. I realized that my sojourn in Berlin had taken me into uncharted waters when, during an intermission one evening, Professor Christoph Stölzl, the chief of the Berlin C.D.U., took me aside to talk about Arnold Schoenberg. Any right-minded American politician would sooner be photographed dangling a baby over a hotel balcony—as Michael Jackson was, in a startling contribution to the city's musical politics—than be caught dead at the opera.

In the past few months, Berlin's opera houses have maintained their place in the limelight by presenting an array of unusually outré productions. The Komische Oper led with a beery, working-class version of "The Bartered Bride," which the critic Manuel Brug described as "Schmettana instead of Smetana." The Deutsche Oper responded with a "Werther" that had Goethe's star-crossed lovers meeting in a laundromat—a mise en scène so realistic that clothes were seen tumbling in the windows of the dryers. ("Others throw bombs, I direct opera," Sebastian Baumgarten, the gifted but erratic young director, proclaimed.) The Staatsoper weighed in with a heavily congested production of Shostakovich's "The Nose," conceived by the painter Jörg Immendorff. The orchestra wore space-alien bodysuits, while singers and chorus members impersonated major players in Middle Eastern politics, from Saddam Hussein to Kofi Annan. We were even treated to a singing Osama bin Laden. The staging seemed designed to provoke a scandal, and, in anticipation of rotten tomatoes, Immendorff told *Der Spiegel* that he would go to the première dressed in "washable fabrics." But the scandal of "The Nose" was that there was no scandal; the creative team received a unanimous round of tepid applause. There was no need for Immendorff to drop by the Deutsche Oper to get his laundry done.

Does a city really need three opera houses? Probably not, but Berlin has long taken pride in its embarrassment of operatic riches. If one house closes, the city will end up with the same eminently sensible—and thus eminently predictable—arrangement that applies in New York, Paris, and London. There will be the "big" house, like the Met or Covent Garden, presenting de-luxe productions with international stars; and there will be the "alternative" house, like New York City Opera or English National Opera, staking out slightly more adventurous repertory. With three companies, you never quite know what you're going to get: perhaps a flamboyant diva performance set against a strict Brechtian concept; perhaps a cast of unknowns trapped in an avant-garde nightmare. Since all three houses are strapped for money, you tend to see fewer international stars, more hungry young singers, and, even on the lunatic fringe, better nights of theatre.

The "opera misery," as one critic has dubbed the situation, honors a long local tradition of byzantine cultural-political imbroglios. Many of the same battles were fought in the nineteen-twenties, when the Staatsoper faced competition from two new entities—the Städtische Oper, on the site of the present Deutsche Oper, and the Kroll Oper, on the Platz der Republik. Suddenly, the city had three companies of international reputation, and though it lacked the capital to keep all three going, a brief golden age unfolded. At the Städtische, Bruno Walter electrified the standard repertory with first-rate casts. At the Kroll, Otto Klemperer led legendary avant-garde productions and premières of contemporary works. And, at the Staatsoper, Erich Kleiber presented, among other sensations, the world première of Berg's "Wozzeck." Meanwhile, at the Theater am Schiffbauerdamm, Kurt Weill unleashed the revolution of "The Threepenny Opera." If I could travel to any time and place in the musical past, it would be to the Berlin of 1928.

Several productions in Berlin this season harked back to the twenties, when, all over Europe, it seemed as though the nineteenth-century art of opera were being remade in a twentieth-century image. "The Nose," a razor-sharp dramatization of Gogol's tale of a nose with a mind of its own, emanated from Bolshevik Russia, where, for an illusory moment, radical art and totalitarian politics went hand in hand. Alexander Zemlinsky's bewitching one-act opera "The Dwarf," which played at the Komische Oper, alongside a companion piece, "A Florentine Tragedy," had its première in 1922, under Klemperer's direction. Finally, at the Deutsche Oper there was Janáček's "Jenůfa," a 1904 masterwork that found international renown in the twenties. Erich Kleiber's unveiling of the opera in 1924 may have marked the moment when an international audience first came to terms with the overpowering beauty of Janáček's art. The Deutsche Oper, compensating for a series of mishaps that led the magazine *Opernwelt* to call the house "Vexation of the Year," imported Nikolaus Lehnhoff's magnificent Glyndebourne production of "Jenůfa," and the sixty-something Anja Silja made a triumphant Berlin return as the benighted, infanticidal Kostelnička.



Zemlinsky's "The Dwarf" harks back to Berlin's glory days.

ANA JUAN

Musical Berlin between the wars generates such nostalgia because it heralded a brilliant future that Hitler made sure would never come to pass—one in which the Central European tradition would embrace the snap and tang of twentieth-century life. In the great operas of the twenties, telephones rang, jazz combos played, gangsters wined and dined, serial killers awaited their next victim. This was a worldly modernism—Joyce's, not Schoenberg's. In "The Nose," conventions of character and place disintegrate under the acidic pressure of Shostakovich's youthful style. In "The Dwarf," a heartbreaking fairy tale somehow becomes aware that it is merely a tale, and the leitmotif of the dwarf's longing for beauty—a smattering of notes over three disjointed minor chords—has the tone of a grandmother reading aloud from the books of her childhood. And, in "Jenůfa," folkish scenes erupt in extreme neurosis and unspeakable violence, with the title character left clinging to her true love amid the ruins. Jiri Kout drew playing of high passion from the Deutsche Oper orchestra: the glorious closing melody surged around the ears like an ever-cresting wave.

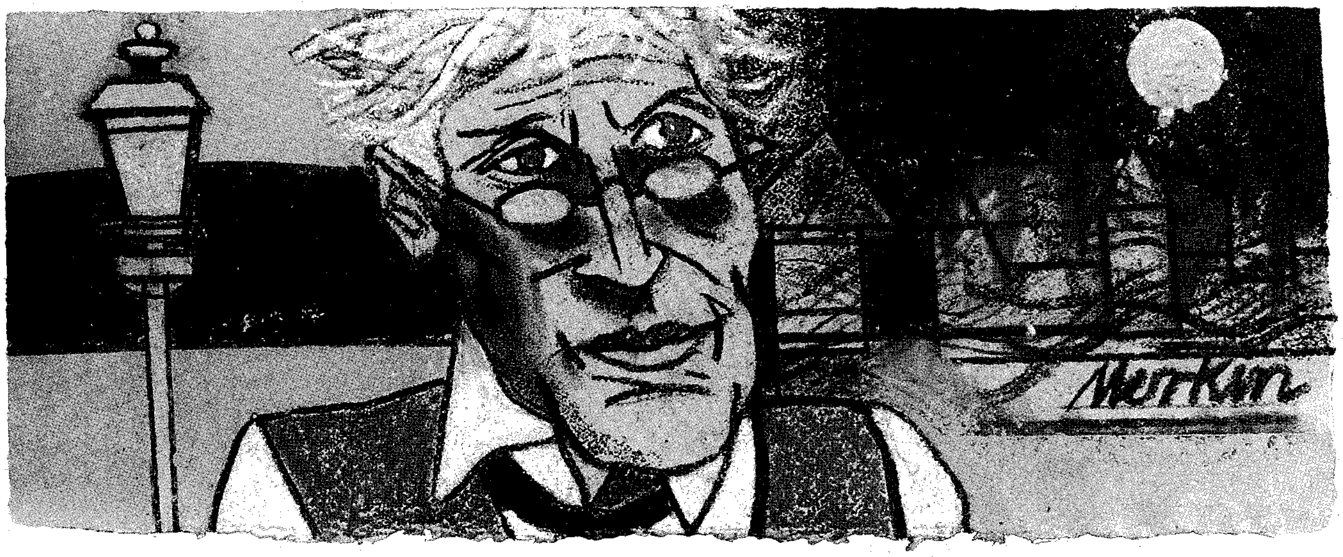
Those who are rushing to downsize Berlin's opera system are unlikely to be swayed by the historical argument that when an opera house closes in Berlin nothing good seems to follow. In 1931, the Kroll Oper went under, ostensibly because the Prussian state government had no more money. Its last production, prophetically, was Janáček's "From the House of the Dead." Behind the scenes, right-wing elements had agitated for Klemperer's removal. In 1933, shortly after the Nazis took power, the Reichstag burned, and the new Reich Chancellor, who had longed to direct opera in his youth, moved the Parliament to the Kroll. From that stage, he delivered several of his most horrific speeches, including the announcement of the annihilation of the Jews. For the sake of world peace, it seems wiser to give budding opera directors every possible opportunity to fulfill their ambitions, so that they need not seek out a less suitable vocation. ♦

THE THEATRE

SOUL FOOD

Getting the spirit onstage.

BY JOHN LAHR



Paul Newman, as the Stage Manager in "Our Town," gives the phrase "deus ex machina" a whole new meaning.

In 1938, when Thornton Wilder's second full-length play, "Our Town," had its world première, at Princeton's McCarter Theatre, *Variety's* verdict was brusque. "The season's most extravagant waste of talent," the broadsheet's critic called the play. In a parting shot about its flamboyantly experimental, Pirandello-influenced construction, he added that it "should never have left the campus." But "Our Town" outfoxed the critics and endured to become part of the century's slim volume of American stage classics. In a marvellous Broadway revival, directed by James Naughton (at the Booth), it speaks as unforgettably as it did back then to the vanity of national despair.

"You never teach anyone anything," said Wilder, who believed that theatre was not a "discussion forum" but a place to "*show* the human condition." "You merely *recall* things to them that lay sleeping just below the level of consciousness." What "Our Town" coaxes its audience to recall is glory in the midst of grief. "So *all* that was going on and we never noticed!" says Emily Webb, who died in childbirth and has chosen to return to Earth to relive her twelfth birthday, before being finally "weaned" from life. Of the play's many stylistic and narrative accomplishments, the most profound is its ability to engineer a sort of imaginative detachment that lets us reconnect to the bittersweet thrill of existence.

Grover's Corners, New Hampshire, is the cosmic Protestant antecedent of the comic Lutheran Lake Wobegon, Minnesota; here, too, the women are strong, the men are handsome, and the children above average. The play's narrator and general master of artifice is the Stage Manager, who gives the phrase "deus ex machina" a whole new meaning. He holds the script, he sets the scene, he serves as an interlocutor between the worlds of the living and the dead, calling the characters into life and out of it; he is, it turns out, the Author of Authors, the Big Guy himself. It seems, in every way, apt for Paul Newman to have taken on this role. God *should* look like Newman: lean, strong-chinned, white-haired, and authoritative in a calm and unassuming way—if only we had all been made in his image! Newman brings onto the stage half a century's expertise and good will; he can't miss, and he doesn't. He doesn't even have to work too hard.

Dressed in a brown vest, tan slacks, and what look like sensible brown Johnston & Murphy brogans, he sets the play's amiable, reflective tone and its aesthetic agenda. "Here's a couple of trellises for those that feel they have to have scenery," he says at the opening, pushing the wooden constructions onto a mostly bare stage. In the preface to the play, Wilder writes, "Our claim, our hope, our despair are in the minds—not in things, not in 'scenery' "; the Stage Manager is there to remind us that what the play sets out to capture is, in Wilder's words, "not verisimilitude but reality." As he introduces us to the inhabitants of Grover's Corners, one by one, it becomes clear that the play is a sort of séance with the dead. "Here's his wife comin' downstairs to get breakfast," the Stage Manager says of Mrs. Gibbs (Jayne Atkinson). "She's up in the cemetery now." This is a paradigm, it seems, of both life and playwriting, in which the dramatist fashions an event from his interior world, haunted as it is by scenes, voices, and fragments of memory. The play itself appears to make this connection at the finale, when the newly dead Emily comes to terms with her former glibness about life. "Do any human beings ever realize life while they live it—every, every minute?" she asks the Stage Manager. "Saints and poets maybe," he replies.

RICHARD MERKIN

Because the play's roles are allegorical, more illustrated than characterized, "Our Town" requires actors with strong personalities. As Emily's mother, Mrs. Webb, Jane Curtin gets amusingly persnickety at her teen-age daughter's infernal questions—for instance, whether she's pretty enough to make people interested in her. "Now stop it," she tells Emily (Maggie Lacey, who is very pretty indeed). "You're pretty enough for all *normal* purposes." Jeffrey DeMunn, who plays Mr. Webb, the editor of the town paper, also has an appealing bluster. And Stephen Spinella, as Simon Stimson, the town drunk who turns into the town suicide, wrings every sour comic note from a small part. Even in Purgatory, Stimson's ghost percolates with negativity. "Now you know: that's what it *was* to be alive," he tells Emily. "To always be at the mercy of one self-centered passion, or another. . . . Ignorance and blindness!" But the living heart of the play lies in the romance between the young Emily and the strapping George Gibbs (played by Ben Fox with a puppy-dog eagerness). Both actors exude decency and sweetness, and their courtship is moving without being cloying. Lacey's winning openness makes Emily's death even more heartbreaking. The audience falls completely silent as she speaks to us from the other world—the world of loss—about the miraculous moment that we still inhabit. "Goodbye, world," she says. "Goodbye to clocks ticking—and my butternut tree! And Mama's sunflowers and food and coffee—and new-ironed dresses and hot baths and sleeping and waking up!"

With its plain speaking that is at once philosophical, tender, droll, and cunning, "Our Town" brings news of that fragrant world—a world of moonlight and flowers and community and the extraordinariness of ordinary things. "We all know that *something* is eternal," the Stage Manager says. "And it ain't houses and it ain't names, and it ain't earth, and it ain't even stars—everybody knows in their bones that *something* is eternal, and that something has to do with human beings." Wilder's unfashionable insistence on embracing wonder as well as woe is both gallant and exhilarating. "All Nature strives to bring every detail to its truest expression of its function," he once wrote to an ill friend. "All Nature is working *for* you. Rise above immediate things and feel that—get a-holt of that. Float in the teleological tide." This is precisely the ride that "Our Town" offers. It leaves us with a sense of blessing, and the unspoken but palpable command to achieve gratitude in what remains of our days on earth.

While "Our Town" knows exactly what it's about and finds a language that perfectly realizes its intellectual ambitions, "Crowns" (at Second Stage) is an excellent theatrical idea that can't decide what it is—gospel celebration or sociological treatise. Adapted by its director, Regina Taylor, from the eponymous book by Michael Cunningham and Craig Marberry, the show is an inquiry into the aesthetic of looking good—what it calls "hattitude." For African-American women and men, the play tells us, style has traditionally been a way to take up space in a world that refuses to acknowledge them, a stage-managed victory in a life of too much defeat. In slave culture, church was the only place where African-Americans could freely congregate and express themselves: "So if you had something you wanted to show off and be in style, you'd wear it to church."

But, with the stage framed by two columns of hats that rise up to the ceiling, and a proscenium on which is written, "Our crowns have been bought and paid for, all we have to do is wear them," "Crowns" is less elegant than its staging. Its premise—a city girl is sent to the South to learn about her roots from her grandmother—is thin, and, although the play is a mere ninety minutes, the attenuated exposition makes it half an hour too long. "Crowns" is about invoking spirit; and a fierce survival spirit does come through when Ebony Jo-Ann growls gospel riffs, when Lillias White jumps for joy, and when the sensational percussionist David Pleasant thumps out the heartbeat of African rhythms at the side of the stage. But the moments when the appealing cast members can cut loose and just let their attitudes speak for themselves are few. If you're watching the percussionist and not the actors, there's something wrong with what's onstage. ♦

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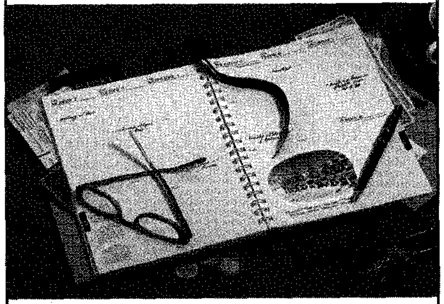

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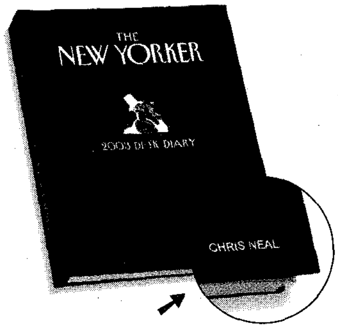

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THE CURRENT CINEMA

LOOKING BACK

"About Schmidt" and "Russian Ark."

BY ANTHONY LANE

The new Alexander Payne movie, "About Schmidt," is, when you get down to it, about Schmidt. In fact, it is *all* about Schmidt (Jack Nicholson). There is barely a scene in which, glazed with inertia, he does not swinishly loll. Our initial sight of Warren Schmidt finds him sitting in his office at an Omaha insurance company, as he has sat, more or less, for thirty-five years. (In Louis Begley's novel, of which mere traces remain, Schmidt was a Manhattan attorney.) Today is his last day in the business; from here on, he will find that, to his loved ones, as to the unloved hordes who constitute the rest of society, he has shrunk to a spent force.

Schmidt is married to Helen (June Squibb), whom we are invited to mock for her orderly ways; it is an especially cruel stroke, on the director's part, to kill her off as she cleans the house. Schmidt himself is no less persnickety; once widowed, he asks his daughter, Jeannie (Hope Davis), to tend him, telling her precisely how to make his lunch as if instructing troops in the loading of a gun. Soon enough, Jeannie retires from the fray, leaving Schmidt to cope on his own. After a brief interval of chaos, he climbs aboard the family Winnebago and embarks on what I fear is intended as a journey of self-discovery. The hitch is that, in order to complete such a trip, you need a self to begin with, and Schmidt is hard to call. Is he a hollow man, or a fully fledged soul who has been plucked and spatchcocked by the attrition of modern life?

It is to Payne's credit that the question arises at all, for not many directors can be bothered to approach what is still the most taxing of dramatic subjects. Forget superheroes, or the reëmergence of wizards with beards down to their belts; try filming the tale of an ordinary man. It is *the* topic of a demotic age, and film still doesn't know what to make of it. The task becomes feasible, perhaps, in the more tranquil arts. Chekhov could write something called "A Boring Story" because on the page frustration can acquire its own style—a light, unembittered comedy—and, casting further back, we inhale an inexplicable mystery from the servants and housekeepers who so mildly take their place within the frame of a Chardin. Their workaday rites take on a sacred air, and yet the figures remain stitched to their backdrops, as they themselves would prefer. Cinema, on the other hand, is hellbent on foregrounding, on sucking people out of their mires of circumstance and setting them up for show. That was the tactic of Frank Capra, whose films liked to bully us on behalf of the democratic urge. Mr. Smith goes to Washington in the name of normal folk, and he is duly glossed with the abnormality of endeavor. Only by the grace of Jimmy Stewart do we keep faith in his existence.

Which brings us back to Jack. To put the matter at its bluntest: If you wish to display an unexceptional American, don't pick Nicholson. At least, don't pick him now. There was a time, somewhere around "The Last Detail," when the roles were more important than the man—when stardom had not yet effaced his rougher excrescences or polished away the smear of streets and bars. These days, he engulfs movies with his knowingness. I saw "About Schmidt" on the opening night of the New York Film Festival, during which Nicholson capered onto the stage. "When you see me in this picture, I want you to remember how handsome I was," he said, tucking

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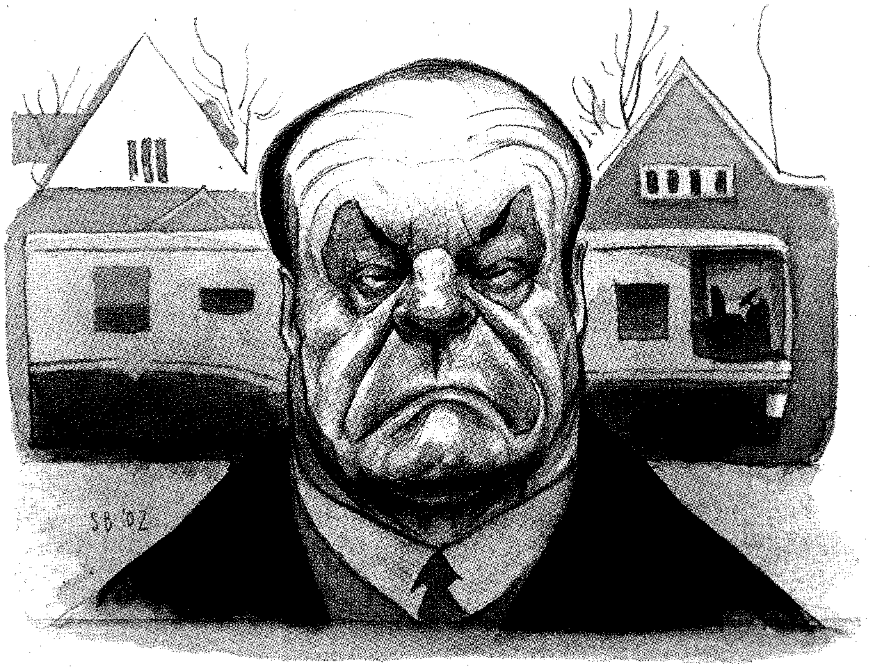
the audience neatly into his pocket. From that opening scene in the office, people roared with glee, and Jack gave them just enough—a glum set of the mouth, a tremor of the eyebrow—to signal that, while inhabiting the corporeal person of Schmidt, he himself was floating somewhere above and beyond the poor fellow's predicament.

The next two hours became an anguish of ambivalence. The audience had come to be pleasured, and you could feel them willing the film to declare itself funny, so that they could enjoy its sardonic take on the mores of the Midwest. To an extent, they were gratified. Dermot Mulroney, in the role of Jeannie's fiancé, and Kathy Bates, who plays his frisky and gelatinous mother, take the decision to play the piece for laughs. It is an easier path, and probably a smarter one; the film accommodates them with ease, whereas the pathos of "About Schmidt"—of the careful, Chekhovian work that it could have been—gradually slides away, like the lovely shots of the open road and the encompassing flatlands through which the loner drives.

Intercut with this is the picture's true romance. In a spasm of charity, Schmidt arranges to sponsor an orphan in Africa named Ndugu. Part of the deal is that he gets to correspond with the boy, and there are sharp, snippy voice-overs of the middle-aged bore—heading fast toward the ruined pastures of his old age—raving about his wife, his former employers, and his future son-in-law. At the close, a letter arrives from the nun who looks after Ndugu, thanking Schmidt for his kindness and encouragement; it is both a rebuke and a redemption, and, to be fair, Nicholson takes the punch beautifully, turning what could have been merely sentimental into an unmanning—a meltdown of all that he has tried and failed to be. Yet it comes too late. Catharsis functions only after much has been suffered, and the tribulations of Schmidt have been too silly for suffering—Nicholson doped up on painkillers, having ricked his neck on a water bed, is the unmistakable stuff of farce. We are left to rue a missed opportunity, and to wonder when somebody *will* forge a masterpiece from the so-so existence of a regular guy. Of course, if you believe the Internet Movie Database, which I searched for "About Schmidt," such a work already exists: "If you like this title, we also recommend 'Rocky III.' " Indeed.

Advance word on "Russian Ark" has been so eager that I was starting to feel worried. Ninety minutes long, subtitled with Russian dialogue, set in The Hermitage, in St. Petersburg, caparisoned in tailcoats and ball gowns, and directed by Alexander Sokurov, maker of the ineffable "Mother and Son": it sounded like something that could be handled only after a regime of round-the-clock Tolstoy and Nordic trekking. What is more, the whole thing unravels in one unbroken take.

In the event, all fears are calmed. By the time of the closing shot—twists of fog rising like spectres from a leaden sea—even the most stubborn viewer will be lying back in a state of happy hypnosis. The film prowls with feline inquiry through the museum, gazing not just at the pictures on the walls but at the figures who throng and linger in the rooms. None of this should be mistaken for documentary; we can hardly keep pace with the miniature dramas that come and go before us, most of them culled from the collective memory of Russia. We slip with liquid confidence through time, so that one scene shows Catherine the Great tramping across the snow of the courtyard, her breath condensing into imperial steam, while another eavesdrops on Nicholas and Alexandra, with their benighted offspring, as they enjoy a prerevolutionary breakfast. There is a strong flavor of reactionary romanticism to this journey, yet Sokurov veers past the blandishments of nostalgia, and nobody who can train his lens so intently on a pair of saint's hands, as painted by El Greco, could be tarred by charges of kitsch. I cannot think of a film quite as devoted to the consolations of art, yet Sokurov's melancholy is so contagious—even sociable—that you come out of the theatre feeling vastly unconsoled.



Jack Nicholson is cast as a regular guy, who takes to the road.

The tour is narrated, as if it were a novel, by a low, wistful voice-over, baffled at first by its surroundings. ("Has all this been staged for me? Am I expected to play a role?") Of the hundreds of people in the movie, one alone—a dark-clad, frizzy-haired diplomat, presumably French—appears to notice the narrator, and the two of them maintain a tetchy but conspiratorial backchat. As for the single take, I can pay it no higher praise than to say that, after a while, I failed to notice it. The technique exists not to be shown off (as was always the suspicion with Hitchcock's elaborate camera moves in "Rope") but to serve the musing restlessness of the film's spirit. "Russian Ark," which climaxes in a costumed waltz with full orchestra, must have been a nightmare to choreograph and control, since all the actors and extras had to hit their marks with the exactness of a live performance. The film sails on, however, like the most frictionless of dreams. ♦

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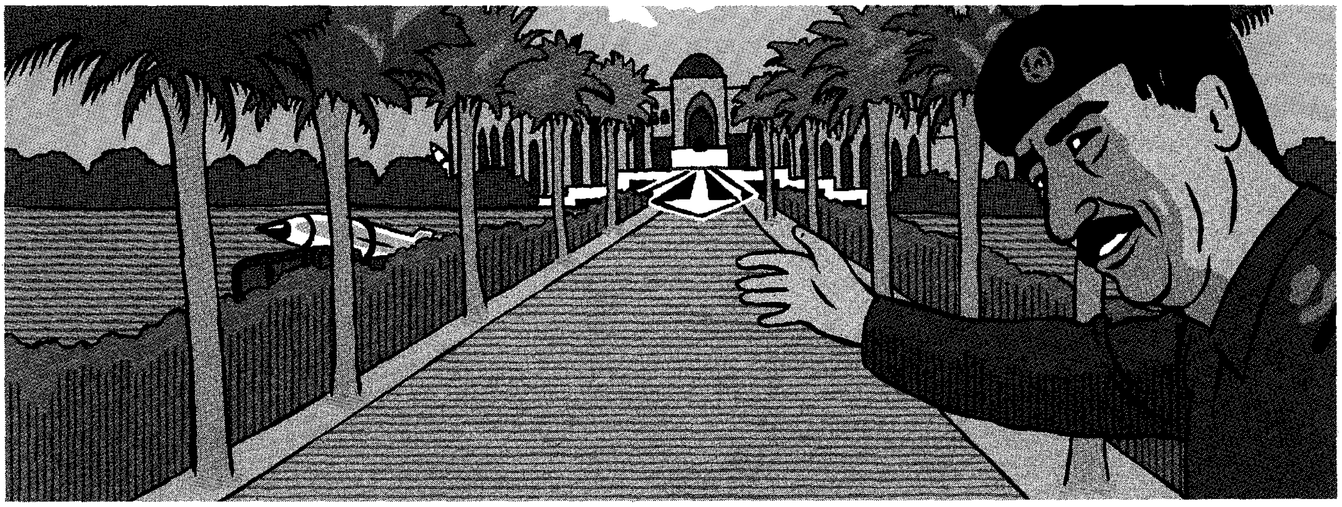

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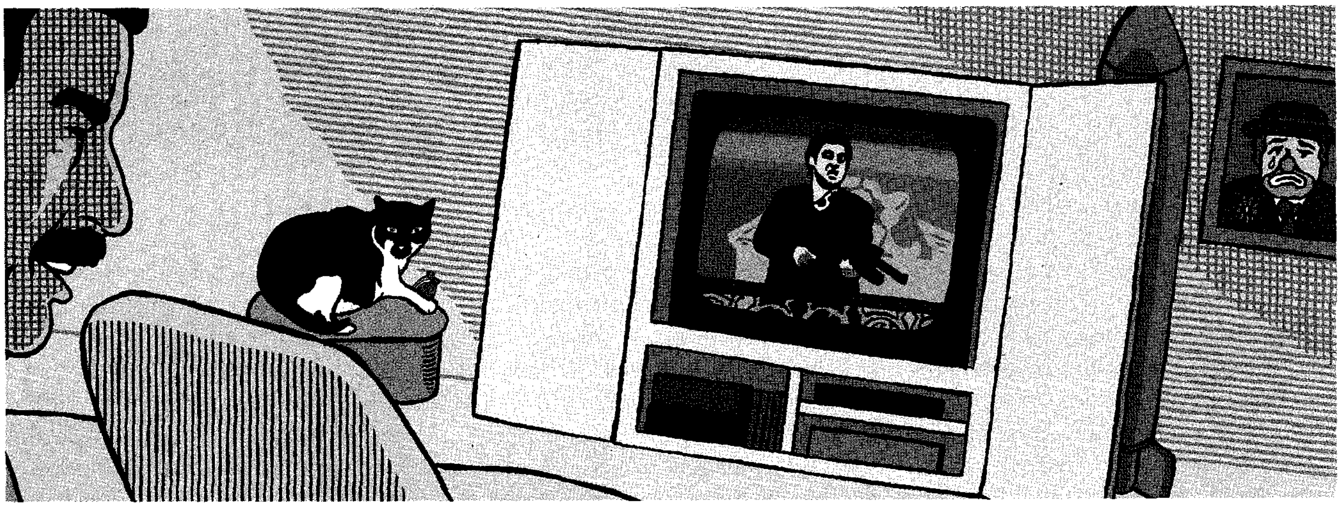

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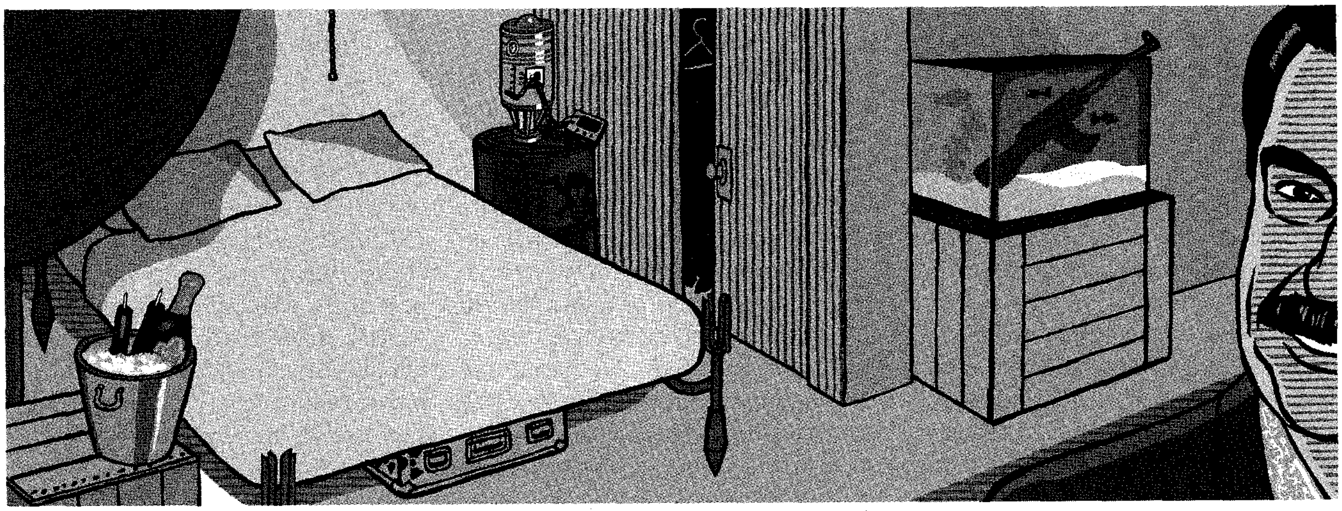

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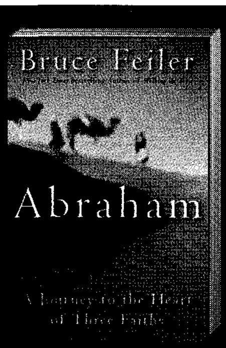
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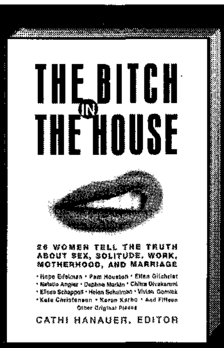
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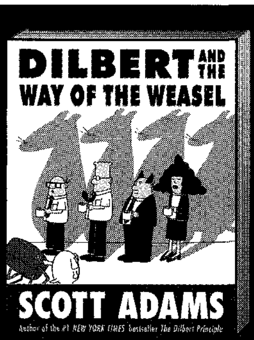
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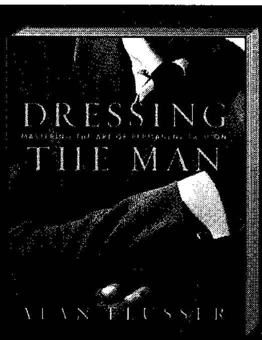
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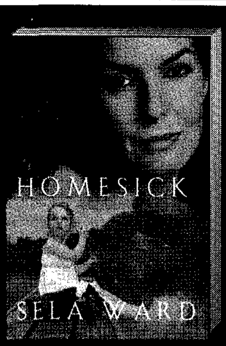
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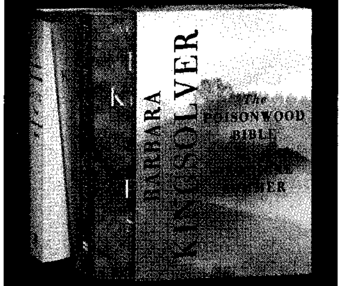
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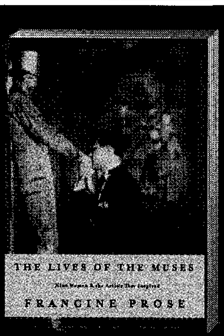
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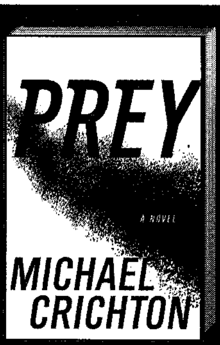
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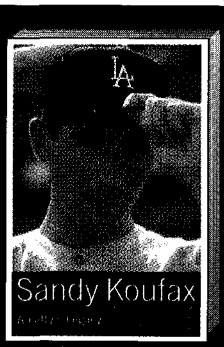
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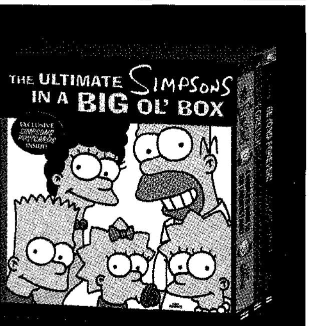
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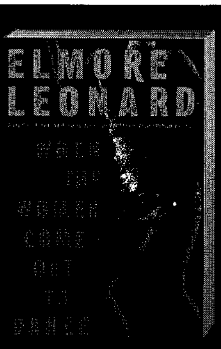
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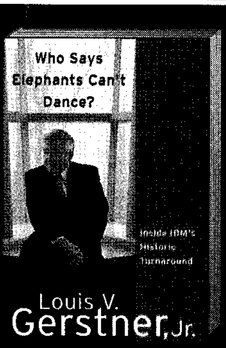
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